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Jean Vanier's Concept of the Healing Community

by

Brian James Klassen

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

Counselling Psychology

Department of Educational Psychology

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1995

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled JEAN VANIER'S CONCEPT OF THE HEALING COMMUNITY submitted by Brian James Klassen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION.

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the writings of Jean Vanier, a French-Canadian philosopher and founder of L'Arche communities. The intention was to examine the psychologically healing processes intrinsic within Vanier's notion of community. In this thesis, an examination of the term "community" with related notions such as "self-help" groups was conducted. The focus in this thesis was on the relational aspects of community (as opposed to geographical or political aspects). A cogent definition of the term was offered.

A qualitative methodology was employed, using hermeneutical principles in order to interpret how community provides psychological health to its members. The findings discerned the following themes as being essential to Vanier's notion of community: spirituality, poverty, authenticity, forgiveness, celebration, altruistic love, and fidelity. It was concluded that these seven themes account for the psychological healing that occurs within the L'Arche communities. In addition to this, the application was made that the healing role of community in our society is most evident in the forms of support groups and psychotherapy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to:

Dr. W. J. Hague. Thank you for your immense support and encouragement in regards to this project. You enabled me to clarify many confusing ideas and pursue a topic that was both personally satisfying and psychologically relevant. It has been a pleasure both working with you and learning from you.

Dr. C. R. Yewchuk. Thank you for your willingness to be a part of this project. I appreciated your honest questions and skillful criticism as well as your eagerness to better understand the topic.

Dr. K. L. Ward. Thank you for your participation in the final stages of this thesis. You helped me more clearly define my purpose for writing this. I appreciated your support.

To my classmates. It has been an immeasurable pleasure spending so many hours together.

To Marcia, Jacqueline, Benjamin (and Emily). Thanks for putting up with me over the last two and a half years. Your patience and encouragement have gone beyond measure. Thanks for being such an integral part of my life. I love you very much.

And finally, to my Saviour, Jesus Christ. May all the glory go to you.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction..... 1

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature..... 3
Community..... 3
Definition of Community..... 4
Self-Help Groups..... 6
Comparison of Self-Help and Community..... 8
Psychological and Social Support..... 8
Negative Communities..... 10
Psychological Health..... 12
Postmodern Culture..... 15
Constructive Postmodernism..... 17
Deconstructive Postmodernism..... 18
A Review of Postmodern Society..... 19

Chapter 3: Foundations of Method..... 23
Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research..... 23
Hermeneutics..... 24
The Hermeneutic Circle..... 25
A Cautionary Remark..... 26

Chapter 4: Methodology..... 28
Procedure for Discerning Themes..... 28
Guidelines for Discerning Themes..... 28
Steps Taken for Discerning Themes..... 29
Subthemes..... 29
Biases and Assumptions..... 30
Biography of Jean Vanier..... 31

Chapter 5: Findings..... 33

Theme 1: Spirituality..... 33
Definition..... 33
The Role of Spirituality in Vanier's Community. 34
Subtheme: Dependence On God..... 35
Subtheme: Changed Values..... 37
Subtheme: Community Exemplifies God's Love.... 38
Subtheme: Prayer..... 40
Individual Prayer..... 40
Communal Prayer..... 41

Theme 2: Poverty..... 42
Subtheme: Serving the Poor Is Serving Jesus... 42
Subtheme: The Benefits of the Poor..... 43
Subtheme: The Impact of the Poor..... 44
Subtheme: The Costs of Serving the Poor..... 45

Theme 3: Authenticity..... 47

Definition..... 47
Subtheme: Humankind Is Handicapped..... 48
Community Exposes Weaknesses..... 49
Subtheme: Community Provides a Safe Environment..... 51
The Role of Authenticity..... 53
Subtheme: Authenticity Builds Community..... 53
Subtheme: Authenticity Encourages Growth..... 54
Subtheme: Authenticity Is Necessary For Altruism..... 55

Theme 4: Forgiveness..... 58
Definition..... 58
Subtheme: Spiritual Forgiveness..... 59
Subtheme: Practical Forgiveness..... 59

Theme 5: Celebration..... 61
Definition..... 61
Subtheme: Celebration is Purposeful..... 62
Celebration of Unity..... 62
Subtheme: Celebration is Practical..... 63
Celebrating Traditions..... 63
Laughter as Celebration..... 64
Meal Time as Celebration..... 64
Spiritual Celebrations..... 64

Theme 6: Altruistic Love..... 66
Definition..... 66
Subtheme: The Human Need For Love..... 67
Subtheme: Altruistic Love Promotes Change..... 69
Love Breaks Down Barriers..... 69
Love Reveals a Person's Value..... 69
Love Is the Starting Point For Growth and Healing..... 70
Subtheme: Altruistic Love Is a Precondition for Community..... 71
Subtheme: The Transformation to Altruistic Love..... 73
The Role of Spirituality In the Transformation..... 74

Theme 7: Fidelity..... 76
Definition..... 76
Subtheme: A Common Goal..... 77
Implicit and Explicit Goals..... 77
The Need For an Explicit Goal..... 78
Losing Sight of the Goal..... 78
Subtheme: A Sense of Belonging..... 79
What It Means to Belong..... 79
Creating a Sense of Belonging..... 79

Subtheme: Commitment 80
Commitment to Community 80
Commitment to Each Other 81
Subtheme: Trust 82
Subtheme: Unity 83
The Role of Unity 83
Creating Unity 84

Chapter 6: Conclusions 86
Summary of Themes 86
Spirituality 86
Poverty 87
Authenticity 87
Forgiveness 88
Celebration 88
Altruistic Love 89
Fidelity 89
Summary of the Healing Process 89
Findings in Relation to Literature Review 90
1. Community 91
2. Healing 92
Vanier's Response to Postmodern Culture 93
The "Empty Self" 94
Individualism and "Finding Oneself" 94
Relativism 94

Chapter 7: Reflections and Implications 96
Implications for Future Research 97
Application 98
The Role of Community in Support and Self-Help Groups 98
The Role of Community in the Counselling Process 99
Final Reflections 100

References 102

Chapter 1

Introduction

The term "community" is one that carries with it idealized cognitions and images that tend to elicit a strong response from many individuals (Spitzberg and Thorndike, 1992). It is a term that invokes a certain sense of nostalgia, a desire to return to a previous era in which we imagine a closeness within family and neighbourhood (Daniels, 1985; Spitzberg and Thorndike, 1992). It is an elusive notion that is defined in almost as many different ways as there are writers on the subject--each one emphasizing a particular sociological, psychological or political perspective from which to examine community.

The psychological and sociological literature suggests that those of us living in North American society are becoming increasingly empty and lacking purpose and meaning (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Cushman, 1990; Donohue, 1990; Hauerwas, 1981; Nisbet, 1962; Sarason, 1976). Much of this social commentary attributes many of our personal and societal problems to the loss of what in the past was taken for granted. To fill this supposed void, our society pushes us to focus on the American dream (Bellah et al., 1985; Donohue, 1990; Hauerwas, 1981), consumerism (Bellah et al., 1985; Cushman, 1990; Featherstone, 1991), psychotherapy (Bellah et al., 1985; Cushman, 1990; Donohue, 1990; Lasch, 1979), all wrapped within a context of individualism that keeps us from focusing on anything or anyone other than our own selves and needs (Donohue, 1990; Lash, 1979; Taylor, 1991). Because of this emphasis on our selves and our material desires (or "needs"), we fail to establish intimate relationships with others, thus prohibiting the establishment of true community (Bellah et al., 1985; Nisbet, 1962). These aforementioned writers frequently see a sense of community as an answer to these problems yet little time is spent discussing how community actually affects us. They focus on the crises in society and on possible solutions, but the impact of these often community-related decisions is left with minimal explication and with little insight shed on the practical impact to be had on the individual.

One philosopher, Jean Vanier, has spent considerable time focusing on the notion of community both from an intellectual and practical perspective. His worldwide establishment of homes for mentally handicapped individuals (called L'Arche) has been

founded on the Biblical teachings of the Beatitudes (Dunne, 1986) and focus on the belief that community provides a healing environment. Thus as shall be seen, according to Vanier, community provides a healing environment for the mentally handicapped as well as for the assistants who come to work at the various homes established by Vanier.

In this thesis, I do not endeavor to deal with the healing of community for those who are specifically mentally handicapped. Vanier's example and ideas extend far beyond only one group within a given population. His ideas are universal, deriving from a wide range of religious teachers and leaders. They apply to all of us. As one reads Vanier's writings, this becomes increasingly clear: we are all handicapped in some way and need each other to grow and develop into complete human beings (Vanier, 1979).

In light of this, my thesis is a qualitative analysis, using hermeneutical principles in order to examine the writings of Jean Vanier and so begin to understand how, in his eyes, community provides psychological health to its members.

As one reads the following research, it will quickly become clear that I am taking a positive view of community. My portrayal of community is of it being anti-narcissistic and altruistic. I readily admit that I am prejudicing my case. My perspective on community supports my belief as will become evident on the pages that follow. Nevertheless, I will briefly consider so-called negative communities, looking particularly at religious cults--extreme examples--and shall suggest that such communities lie outside of the definition of community.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In this section I will endeavor to review the relevant literature concerning the notion of community and its potential role in society. It would seem imperative that within such a review, an examination of a modern popular form of community--self-help groups--is included. Although such groups include many elements of community, there are many stark differences between the two. Within this context, the ideas of support and well-being will be examined. Following this, I will examine the idea of negative communities and will look at whether there is anything that separates such communities from the positive ones written about in this paper. Finally, a brief examination of our society will be included, focusing primarily on the modern/post-modern aspects and how these relate to the notion of community.

Community

The term "community" has a varied usage within the social science literature and has been applied in many different contexts and for many different purposes. For the most part, however, the usage of community can be grouped into two broad categories (Gusfield, 1975 ; McMillan & Chavis, 1986): the Territorial, which includes the geographical (Poplin, 1972; Redekop, 1975; Wellman, 1982) and political (Crowley, 1987; Kamenka, 1982; Taylor, 1982; Thigpen, 1972) perspectives; and the relational, which is concerned with the quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location (Dunham, 1986; Gusfield, 1978; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Although there is much overlap among these two groups of writings with much of the literature including aspects of both, the latter will be the focus of this review.

A relational view of community focuses on the interaction between people regardless of the geographical location and physical environment of this interaction. Its main component is the quality or depth of relationship as can be seen in:

1) the solidarity of the group (Clark, 1977; Gusfield, 1975; Rogers, 1980)
2) the commitment of the members to the group and to each other (Benn, 1982; Sellers, 1975)
3) the degree of interdependence and trust among group members (Hauerwas, 1981; Sumarah, 1983)
4) the level of caring (Benn, 1982; Hiskes, 1982;

Sellers, 1975; Spitzberg & Thorndike, 1992)

5) the degree of transcendence of self in order to meet the needs of other members (Dunne, 1986; Jones, 1975; Redekop, 1975)

6) the fulfillment of one's own needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)

7) altruistic behaviour (Bulmer, 1986; Hauerwas, 1981; Rousseau, 1991)

7) a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974; Spitzburg & Thorndike, 1992)

8) a shared or common experience, purpose, or belief (Hauerwas, 1981; Jones, 1975; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Redekop, 1975; Sellers, 1975; Spitzberg & Thorndike, 1992). 9) Furthermore, it is only in such a relationship that one can find wholeness, completeness, or full psychological well-being (Harvey, 1973; Tinder, 1980).

There is another vital distinction to be made regarding the notion of community. Although the literature expresses a high degree of consistency that community is a social ideal toward which humankind should strive, there is also the belief that it is unattainable and in fact solely a myth or utopian ideal. Daniels (1985) suggests that community is a nostalgic ideal which we believe was realized in past generations. We have a yearning to return to an idealized picture of what community is supposedly about, what Daniels calls our "lost home." Not surprisingly, this nostalgic search never reaches fruition but remains much like the search for the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.

Similarly, Tinder (1980) states that the ideal of community is both alluring and unattainable. He writes that "full community is unattainable partly because man is a natural being; he lives in space and time, and he dies" (p. 2). Because of the spatial, temporal, and mortal nature of human existence, alienation is an inseparable consequence. In other words, "every association is spread out in space, eroded by time, and doomed by the mortality of its participants" (p. 2). Tinder continues by suggesting, however, that community must be a legitimate ideal because of its persistence in human thought.

Definition of Community

It would be worthwhile at this point to define how the term "community" will be used throughout this thesis. A particular and succinct definition is necessary in order to clarify this sometimes confusing topic.

One definition proposed by McMillan and Chavis

(1986) serves as a useful place to start in seeking to understand the term "community." They state that their proposed definition has four elements:

> The first element is membership. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is influence, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is reinforcement: integration and fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is shared emotional connection, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. (p. 9)

We can gather from this that a sense of community "is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their shared commitment to be together" (p. 9).

> Carl Rogers (1980) states that
> most of the members [of such a community] feel both a keen sense of their own power and a sense of close and respectful union with all of the other members. The ongoing process includes increasingly open interpersonal communication, a growing sense of unity, and a collective harmonious psyche, almost spiritual in nature. (p. 182)

Rousseau (1991) takes this idea a step further. She suggests that true community can occur only through altruistic love. It is only through truly desiring someone else's good that one's own good can be attained. According to Rousseau, "where love is lacking, so is community" (p. xii). Without altruistic love, we are left only with social groupings and mere associations.

One other essential element of community is contributed by Hauerwas (1981) who writes that "one of the profoundest commitments of a community. . . is providing a context that encourages us to trust and depend on one another" (p. 11). Thus we can summarize community as:

1) involving membership;
2) a place where each person matters to each other and others' needs are emphasized above one's own (altruistic love);
3) a place where members' needs will be met through the group;
4) and where there will be a growing sense of interpersonal openness and trust.

This describes the ideal community and in reality this ideal is only occasionally achieved. In actuality, it is necessary to envision community hierarchically. At the base are the more basic elements of community (membership, influence, integration of needs, and shared emotional connection) and at the pinnacle is true community. The elements of one's needs being met, openness, trust, and altruism fall between the base and the pinnacle. Yet, true communities strive towards the ideal. As a result, this definition will serve as a guide throughout this paper.

Self-help Groups

A notion closely related to community is that of self-help groups. This phenomenon necessitates examination because of the many similarities between the two. My purpose at this point is to examine these groups because much research has been conducted on the benefits of self-help. Such groups are communal, but differ from my established definition of community in some crucial ways.

Self-help groups "are made up of individuals who have the same problem or need and whose members help each other in dealing with the problem" (Reissman, 1985). They function as "a process of mutual aid between peers who meet together to try and ameliorate their troubles" (Rodolfa & Hungerford, 1982). Thus the focus of such groups is on empowering their members in order to overcome the identified issue (Adams, 1990; Jacobs & Goodman, 1989; Reissman, 1985; Rodolfa & Hungerford, 1982). Empowerment in this sense can be defined as "the process by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards maximizing the quality of their lives" (Adams, 1990, p. 43).

According to Reissman (1985), such empowerment results from the realization that the individual can in fact help him or herself. They are made aware that they can control some element of their lives. Similarly, Jacobs and Goodman (1989) suggest that empowerment is the result of the internal control of the group. Thus the power of the group resides in the membership. This is an essential understanding for the most part, as such groups begin in a state of powerlessness in which individuals are struggling and coping poorly with a defining issue, yet through coming together are able to find empowerment (Katz & Bender, 1976).

Many authors have pointed out the predominant characteristics of self-help groups. Among these

characteristics are a problem-focused orientation so that there is a clearly identified reason for coming together as a group (Adams, 1990; Jacobs & Goodman, 1989; Kurtz & Chambon, 1987; Lakin, 1985; McFadden, Seidman, & Rappaport, 1992; & Reissman, 1985). This similarity in suffering unifies members and provides an environment of solace and strength (Jacobs & Goodman, 1989).

A second characteristic is the emphasis on providing psychological and social support to its members (Lakin, 1985; Maton, 1988; McFadden, Seidman, & Rappaport, 1992). The belief, upheld by current research, that social and psychological support play an essential role in physical and psychological health is well heeded. More on the issue of such support will be dealt with shortly.

In most self-help groups, the group's autonomy and self-governance is a third characteristic (Jacobs & Goodman, 1989; McFadden et al., 1992). There is no outside leadership with the possible exception of a professional resource person who may be called upon from time to time for purposes of consultation (Mcfadden et al., 1992). It is the members who provide the primary sources of help (Lakin, 1985).

Similarly, there is rarely a permanent leader in such groups, but rather leaders serve at the pleasure of the group (Jacobs & Goodman, 1989). The result of this fourth characteristic, that of equality among members, is that tasks and responsibilities are shared by a number of individuals rather than concentrated in a leader (Jacobs & Goodman, 1989; Moeller, 1983). Such an emphasis may result in psychological benefits for the members including improved self-efficacy and self-esteem along with personal satisfaction (Hackman, 1976). In other words, necessary involvement as described here leads to empowerment.

These last two points are sometimes seen as being critical in making a distinction between self-help groups and support groups (Rosenberg, 1984). In support groups, there is a professional leader, an expert in groups and human development, who serves as an active role model and guides the group in its supportive efforts. However, because this is only a negligible difference amidst many similarities, it is of minimal benefit to examine support groups separately. Other researchers also tend to lump self-help and support groups into one type of therapeutic organization (e.g., Pearson, 1983).

A final characteristic of self-help groups predominant in the literature is that participation

within the group is free (McFadden et al., 1992; Moeller, 1983). Thus, finances are infrequently a reason for not being able to participate in these groups. As a result, the groups are open to all who share the identified problem and are wanting to seek support and encouragement in resolving it.

This adequately summarizes the purpose and characteristics of self-help groups. As can be seen, there is a substantial area of similarity between these groups and the way I have defined community. However, there are some differences that are worth noting.

Comparison of Self-Help and Community

In comparing the definition of community as used in this thesis and self-help groups, a number of distinct differences are apparent. Communities include a high degree of self-help if necessary, but self-help groups frequently do not reach the relational level of community. The notion of community extends beyond the confines of self-help groups. Whereas the focus in self-help groups is on a specific issue or problem to be resolved (such as recovery from alcoholism or sexual abuse), community moves beyond a single self-centred purpose. It extends to the relational realm of human interaction and allows for the occurrence of benefits from trusting, caring, and being with one another. In both groups, personal issues frequently arise. However, in self-help groups, the raison d'etre is to solve a problem whereas in community, the raison d'etre is to establish meaningful relationships. Thus, self-help groups are therapeutic in intent with relationships used as the method of doing therapy, while community is relational in intent with psychotherapy occurring as the result of being in relationship with one another. There is a similarity between both, but the focus is contrasted between the two. Thus, to summarize, for self-help groups, the intent is therapeutic, the purpose is to solve a particular problem, and the focus is on one's own needs. For community, the intent, purpose, and focus is relational. Referring back to the hierarchical description of the definition of community, self-help groups can be considered a type of community based in the lower end of the hierarchy. One cannot deny the community elements found within self-help groups. However, the intent, purpose, and focus differs from true community.

Psychological and Social Support

The research on psychological and social support (referred to as just "social support") in the literature

is surprisingly consistent on the conclusion that social support enhances or has a positive effect upon psychological and physical well-being or health. For example, Pilisuk and Minkler (1985) make the rather austere observation that "the findings, painstakingly assembled from a wide range of studies, suggest that those who are socially isolated and those whose social ties have been recently disrupted are at increased risk for health breakdown and even for death" (p. 6). Many other researchers (see Cohen & Syme, 1985; Ganster & Victor, 1988; and Bloom, 1990 for overviews; also Hays, Chauncey, & Tobey, 1990; Winefield, Winefield & Tiggemann, 1992) state the necessity of social support for psychological and physical health.

Although the vast majority of the research on social support is positive, not all researchers would agree. According to Sommer (1990), the negative aspects of social support have been neglected in the literature. Pagel, Erdly, and Becker (1987) take a realistic perspective when they write that "relationships involve costs as well as benefits" (p. 793). These costs, they suggest "may include such things as broken promises, network members who in the provision of support are irritating, annoying, or overinvolved, and help that comes with strings attached" (p. 793). In some instances social networks might maintain or even exacerbate the psychological disturbance. What needs to be made clear is that although social support is necessary in order to achieve well-being and health, there is a negative side that can impact upon one's well-being.

What then is social support? A number of related definitions are found in the literature. One of the more simplistic definitions available provides a cursory understanding of the concept, stating that the feeling of being loved and valued is the core component of social support (Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, & Sarason, 1987). These researchers continue by stating: "knowing that others love us and would willingly do for us what they can is the essence of social support" (p. 830). A similar definition is provided by Cobb (1976) as "information leading individuals to believe they are cared for and loved, esteemed and valued and belong to a network of communication and mutual obligation" (Bloom, 1990). Ganster and Victor (1988) define social support as having two components: structural and functional. "Structural social support is defined as the existence (or lack) of fundamental social relationships and ties" (p. 17). This includes presence of others, social networks, marital status, formal organizational

membership, and attendance in church. Functional social support is defined as "the qualities of social relationships that are presumed related to stress responses" and are usually "operationalized as the perceptions of the recipient" (p. 18). These include overall quality of social relationships, social companionship, esteem, intimacy of social relations, and the availability, quantity, and timing of the social support.

What is clear from this research is that social support is a critical element in a person's psychological and physical well-being or health. Accordingly, the underlying theme of this thesis, that community provides psychological health and healing, becomes apparent. From our definition of community and from our examination of self-help groups, it is appropriate to suggest that community does provide such social support.

Negative Communities

Thus far, I have spent considerable time presenting my case for the positive side of community, focusing on its many psychological benefits. But as I have previously stated, there is a negative side that many people consider as being related to community. These so-called negative communities are best represented by groups such as David Koresh's Branch Davidians and Jim Jones' People's Temple, both groups coming to an end in a scene of mass death. Cults are plentiful, all apparently meeting or fulfilling some personal need for community or at least, a sense of acceptance (Cushman, 1986). Similarly, the growing phenomenon of street gangs and other deviant adolescent subcultures (such as neo-Nazi skinheads and satanism) offer a feeling of belonging and worthwhileness for those suffering from low self-esteem and a poor home life (Clark, 1992).

In considering such restrictive groups as communities, we must ponder the question posed by Philip Cushman (1986):

> Although current members claim to be ecstatic with happiness and health, reports from former members and clinical research expose psychiatric casualties, ruined lives, and occasional violence.
>
> The disparity between these two points of view needs to be explained and understood: How can adult members appear to be so enthusiastically pleased with a group that restricts and harms them? (p. 1)

Community is presumed healthy in my definition. What then is the difference between restrictive

communities such as those mentioned above that so often lead to psychological (and physical) harm and those that lead to health as I will endeavor to define it? The answer to this may be found in the writing of Mary Rousseau (1991). For her, altruistic love is the essential ingredient in community. If we take a very basic definition of community, a group of people organized for a common purpose or participating in a common activity, then the doors are left open for calling the Branch Davidians, members of People's Temple, street gang members, the Third Reich (and today's neoNazis), Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (or Moonies), and the brawling fans at an English soccer match, a community. And in one small sense they are. But key principles are missing, especially one having to do with altruistic love.

It is true that many of these negative and restrictive communities display an apparent degree of altruism. "The members feel that they are unequivocally accepted, and integrated into this special social system" (Levine, 1989, p. 96). The sense of community and sense of belonging and fraternity are also strongly evident (Enroth, 1979). But beyond these personal interactions, a true sense of altruistic love is not found. The motivation for such a group's existence has nothing to do with love. Rather, the group is generally exposed to the whims and desires of a single dominant leader, or in some cases a small group of leaders, who have little concern for the well-being of those within the organization (Deutsch, 1989). In cults, this leader is often deified and always ascribed virtually superhuman qualities (Levine, 1989). The structure of such organizations is rigidly hierarchical with little or no say coming from the general membership. Authority comes from the leader (supposedly via direct communication with God) and is filtered down through the pyramid until it finally reaches the members. Such structure seems to preclude altruistic love between the leader and a common member. The leader is not concerned with the member's best interest, but rather with his own. According to Deutsch (1989), "there is a paradoxical adherence of certain devotees to their leaders in the face of facts which should logically lead to disillusionment" (p. 147). Even the complete dehumanization of members by the leader in order to maintain control over them is interpreted by members as being self-sacrificial (Deutsch, 1989). The psychological literature on cults is clear: altruistic love is not something that permeates these groups.

Returning to Mary Rousseau's belief that altruism

is essential for community, it follows that "purity of heart" is also an absolute necessity, for as she writes, "community is a psychological reality and our motives determine whether it happens or not" (p. 51). Thus she asserts that there cannot be evil or negative communities. It is a contradiction of terms. Self-centred and evil motivation precludes altruism thus preventing community. From this perspective, cults and other restrictive deviant subcultures cannot be considered true communities. The motivation, the "purity of heart" is missing to confer good upon another for that person's sake, rather than for one's own sake.

Psychological Health

The terms health and well-being have been frequently used throughout this discussion without defining what is meant by them. The assumption of this thesis is that community promotes psychological health or well-being. It is therefore necessary to operationalize these terms.

For the most part, psychological health (usually referred to as mental health in the literature) is poorly defined. For instance, Paul and Hagan (1988) define it "as a balance between the personal characteristics of an individual and the pressures of his environment. This fragile balance is in perpetual motion; the individual is constantly changing, as are his or her surroundings" (p. 5). The World Health Organization (1990) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (p. 1). Smith and Wallston (1992) state that many researchers do not actually define mental health believing that this allows for the phenomenological experiences of the respondents to be investigated. The obvious problem with this is not knowing precisely what is being measured although there are probably "some fairly consistent definitions of health across the general public" (p. 131). None of these definitions, however, shed much light on what psychological health is.

A widely recognized definition of psychological health was promoted by Jahoda (1958). She suggested that a healthy individual has the following characteristics: a positive attitude toward him or herself (self-acceptance); is continually growing or moving toward self-actualization; has a sense of purpose or meaning in life; can function independently or autonomously in the world; perceives reality without significant distortion; and has attained mastery in the environment (i.e., adequate in love and competent in work). Although this definition is 35 years old, it

continues to capture the essence of what psychological health is. Not only does it perceive health from the traditional psychiatric and clinical psychological view as being the absence of mental illness, and an accurate perception of the self, one's circumstances, and the future (Taylor & Brown, 1988), but it also incorporates the need for continued growth and movement towards self-actualization as humanistic psychology would promote (Schultz, 1977).

For the most part, Jahoda's definition has apparently stood the test of time with few serious dissenters. Portions of the definition have been argued against, but overall, it remains well received. One compelling dissension is found in Taylor and Brown (1988), in which they question the accepted notion that an essential component of psychological health is a realistic and balanced conception of self. Rather, they state that some illusion is good for well-being and that it is healthy to see ourselves as better than others. While a traditional definition of mental health asserts that healthy individuals should be aware of both positive and negative aspects of self, Taylor and Brown conclude that evidence indicates "that individuals who are low in self-esteem, moderately depressed, or both are more balanced in self-perception" (p. 196) than those with higher self-esteem. Thus mental health may include a degree of positive illusion regarding the conception of self.

Jahoda's definition alludes to the idea of continued growth throughout one's life. Yet she does not suggest how this occurs. For most people, health and disease are thought of as being diametrically opposed. Health leads to growth while disease leads to stagnation. But this is not necessarily the case. According to Brady (1990),

> a preoccupation with psychological well-being and happiness promotes a denial of the reality and authenticity of distress and suffering--a denial which makes those who are upset feel guilty and apologetic about feeling the way they do. This preoccupation fails to recognize that it is precisely the struggle with and the challenge of life's difficulties which provide the spur to mature psychological functioning. (p. 278)

The norm in our culture, Brady suggests, is increasingly to equate mental health and psychological well-being with happiness. Feeling good has become the norm and any distress or unhappiness is considered unhealthy.

In her conclusion, Brady (1990) states that "we must not outlaw distress; rather, we must come to

appreciate the positive role which anxieties, fears and distress, all an integral part of life, can play" (p. 294). The rejection of suffering and distress in our pursuit of happiness fails to take into account their role in stimulating psychological growth and maturity.

This is the notion upon which Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy is based. According to Frankl, meaning and purpose in life are found through one's work, through loving someone, or through suffering. Frankl (1978) sees suffering as being the most powerful and complete derivative of meaning for people. He writes,

> We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation as its helpless victim, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then counts and matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a tragedy into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation--just think of an incurable disease, say an inoperable cancer--we are challenged to change ourselves. (p. 43)

A comprehensive developmental theory dealing with the necessity of suffering in order to achieve an actualized personality is proposed by Dabrowski in his Theory of Positive Disintegration. Briefly stated, Dabrowski believed that mental disintegration is necessary for psychological growth and development (Dabrowski, K., Kawczak, A., & Piechowski, M. M., 1970).

> Intense inner conflict, dissatisfaction with oneself, disintegration of what we are, to make room for what we might be--these are the themes of Positive Disintegration which builds on the idea that lower level functions have to disintegrate when challenged by higher level functions, then disappear to make room for the higher. (Hague, 1986, p. 118).

Dabrowski found that development occurs not despite suffering but as a result of suffering. They are necessary companions of growth. Rather than avoiding such distress at all costs, these disintegrations provide an opportunity and passageway towards further development (Hague, 1992).

Based upon Dabrowski's theory, de Grace (1974, 1981) compares the traditional concepts of health and disease with the concepts based on this theory. Traditionally, health is equated with stability and disease with crisis. de Grace proposes that it is more realistic and psychologically healthy (based upon the Theory of Positive Disintigration) to consider disease as being either chronic psychological stability or

chronic psychological crisis. Psychological health then, consists of periods of stability followed by periods of crisis in a cyclical fashion. The healthy person would have "the capacity to alternate with fluidity between psychological stability and crisis" (p. 65).

Dabrowski and Frankl are not alone in suggesting that distress and suffering lead to growth and are a part of psychological health. Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development is marked by eight stages, each one characterized by a crisis that needs resolution in order to progress to the next stage. Without the resolution of each crisis, psychological health cannot be attained (Thomas, 1992). Similarly, Shostrom (1972) writes that the valleys of worry, inability, fear, hurt, pain, or frustration lead to psychological growth if we are willing to go through them. According to him, "Facing our hopelessness helps us to discover new resources. The mature man uses his frustrations to propel himself along the journey toward self-actualization" (p. 43).

This notion of distress leading to growth and health should not seem novel. The Biblical notion of death bringing life exemplifies the same process: "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). But in our society, we have chosen to focus only on that which leads to immediate satisfaction and happiness. Any unpleasantness regardless of its potential fruitfulness, is avoided at all costs.

Health is a concept that we frequently misunderstand. If our definition is to include the striving of humans toward actualization or wholeness, then it is necessary that we look beyond happiness as being equivalent to well-being and psychological health and accept the health-promoting role that suffering, pain, crisis, and distress play in achieving true psychological health.

At this point, having examined the notion of community and its related concepts, we now turn to an examination of popular culture and a look at why those of us living in North American post-modern culture frequently do not experience a sense of community.

Postmodern Culture

A cursory review of postmodern literature is no mean feat. Postmodernism is a term used in so many contradictory, confusing, conflicting and obscure ways

that it virtually defies definition. (Griffin, Cobb, Ford, Gunter, & Ochs, 1993; Hassan, 1985; Kuspit, 1990; Taylor, 1992). However, for the purposes of this paper, it is objectively relevant to briefly examine this popular notion. In order to recognize the need for community in our society, an examination of our society and culture must first be undertaken. Thus, an examination of what is meant by postmodernism, followed by a look at a number of recent analyses of current social and cultural conditions will be undertaken.

In order to grasp postmodernism, a definition of modernism must first be attempted for postmodernism is generally considered as an extension or outgrowth of modernism (Griffin et al., 1993; Silverman, 1990; Taylor, 1992). Modernism too, is defined in many different ways. According to Silverman (1990), Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, and Malebranche tend to be cited as the beginnings of modern thinking.

> The idea that man can be an "interpreter of nature" (Bacon) or an observer of the universe through an instrument such as the telescope (Galileo), that one can reshape and control the world through science--inaugurates the "modern world view." (p. 5)

It is this belief that truth is attainable and knowable through the use of the scientific method that best characterizes modernity (Lawson, 1989; Lyotard, 1984). Thus, "modernism is. . . an extension of the Enlightenment project" (Taylor, 1992, p. 12).

Postmodernism then, as the term suggests is a moving beyond the modern.

> Insofar as a common element is found in the various ways in which the term is used, <u>postmodernism</u> refers to a diffuse sentiment rather than to any common set of doctrines--the sentiment that humanity can and must go beyond the modern. (Griffin et. al., 1993, pp. vii-viii)

For many, this means a moving from the industrial to the post-industrial age (Featherstone, 1991).

Others, however, question the usage of the term. Kuspit (1990) suggests that "the only historical reality 'postmodernism' comes to signal is that of its exaggerated significance for theorists, which is one way of understanding how it is that a term can become a signifier without a reference" (p. 53). He writes that postmodernism "achieves ideal, rather than realistic status." Kuspit's critique continues:

> The excessive conflict and contradictoriness--leading not to agreement, but to rancorous confusion--raises the suspicion that the

> conceptualization of postmodernism is more a matter of honor among theorists than of interpretation of phenomenon. . . . It obscures more than it illuminates and fails to provide a genuinely critical/activist understanding. (p. 55)

This leads one to reflect upon the usefulness of attempting to understand the term. Yet it remains a common descriptor of our culture, and so obligates an attempted definition.

Having examined a wide number of attempted definitions of postmodernism, it appears that most of these can fit into two categories as outlined by Griffin (1993; Griffin et al., 1993). These are "constructive," revisionary, or reconstructive postmodernism and "deconstructive" or eliminative postmodernism.

Constructive Postmodernism

This appears to be the less common usage of the word. Its focus is to go beyond the modern by revising and criticizing the premises of modernity, which according to Griffin, if left unchecked, logically lead to deconstructive postmodernism. Science is not rejected, but it is no longer the sole contributor to the construction of our worldview. Science then, is united with ethical, aesthetic and religious institutions in order to form our worldview.

> A postmodern world will involve postmodern persons, with a postmodern spirituality, on the one hand, and a postmodern society, ultimately a postmodern global order, on the other. Going beyond the modern world will involve transcending its individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism. Constructive postmodern thought provides support for the ecology, peace, feminist, and other emancipatory movements of our time, while stressing that the inclusive emancipation must be from modernity itself. (Griffin et al., 1993, pp. viii-ix)

Thus we see that the modern has not so much been eliminated than used as the structure on which to reconstruct a new worldview. Traditional modern beliefs and ideals of science, religion, and society have been recast (Taylor, 1992). Since empirical science has been at the heart of modernism, reconstructive postmodernism is able to accept nonsensory perception, and thus opens itself up to a new set of truths and values (Griffin et al., 1993).

Deconstructive Postmodernism

The second category into which the use of the word postmodernity falls is the deconstructive or eliminative type. With its focus on relativism and even nihilism, "it deconstructs or eliminates the ingredients necessary for a worldview, such as God, self, purpose, meaning, a real world, and truth as correspondence" (Griffin et al., 1993, p. viii). To take this idea further as Hassan (1985) eloquently suggests, postmodernism's tendency is the tendency of indeterminance. Thus we see that in this mode of thinking, there is no truth; all is relative; there is no final authority.

Griffin (1993) believes that deconstructive postmodernism has risen from modern thought that has attempted to develop a moral philosophy independent of metaphysical and specifically, theological belief. Deconstructive postmodernism is, according to Griffin, the logical conclusion to this type of thought (which he terms as ultramodernism). God is dead and religion is eliminated (Taylor, 1992). Individualism flourishes. Jameson (1983 & 1984) describes the new resulting economic system as media society, the society of spectacle, multinational capitalism, consumer society, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, and postindustrial society. In addition, he characterizes postmodernism as including new types of consumption, planned obsolescence, ever more rapidly changing fashions and styles, and the penetration of advertising, television, and media to an unparalleled degree throughout society.

Lawson (1989) summarizes this perspective well when she writes that,

> If we are certain of anything, it is that we are certain of nothing. If we have knowledge, it is that there can be none. Ours is a world awash in relativism. It has seeped into our culture, it threatens to become our faith. The tide may have begun with the end of belief in a universal morality and religious code, but it has swelled with a recognition of the limited and particular perspective of our culture, our time and our society. Its full force is now being felt in the name of post-structuralism and post-modernity.
>
> But at its philosophical core post-modernism is an attack on truth. It is an attack that originates in a critique of the very possibility of objectivity. (p. xi)

Lawson provides a description of what this truthless postmodern world might look like: "We will be loose in a world without constraint, a world without guiding

principles, a world in which anything goes for those with the power to exercise it" (p. xiii). Although these deconstructive postmodernists justify their dismantling of truth as beneficial ("it is under the guise of the rhetoric of truth that the most terrible acts can be justified" p. xiii), we are left with a very different culture--a very different worldview--than past generations have had. We are seemingly left on a pathway without guidance or direction. Modernism provides a reference point from where we have been, but we desire to move far beyond this traditional and outdated mode of thought. The resulting socio-cultural dynamics with an emphasis on the role of individualism (perhaps the primary characteristic of this way of thinking) are described next.

A Review of Postmodern Society

In the past ten years, much has been written on the failings of individualism and its impact on society. Cushman (1990) in his historical account of individualism, has written that "the self" is empty due in part to "the loss of family, community, and tradition" (p. 600) and that this empty self attempts to fill and heal itself through materialism and psychotherapy. He states that society has

> shaped a self that experiences a significant absence of community, tradition, and shared meaning. It experiences these social absences and their consequences "interiorly" as a lack of personal conviction and worth, and it embodies the absences as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger. (p. 600)

Cushman continues by suggesting that in a world without community and tradition, the healing of the self is a complex and daunting task.

Charles Taylor (1991) also addresses the role of individualism in society. In his book, The Malaise of Modernity, he identifies three themes. The first, Taylor suggests, is that the search for the authentic self has become a mask for narcissism. No longer is society's or the community's concern taken into consideration, but only the self has intrinsic value. As a result, humans have lost a sense of higher purpose. The dark side of such individualism "is a centring on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society" (p. 4).

The second theme has to do with the disappointment of technology as being a liberating force. The focus is on instrumental reasoning and what science can

accomplish rather than on the whole person and the needs that such a person has.

The final theme is the general abandonment of civic life by the citizen. Taylor calls this "the atomism of the self-absorbed individual" (p. 9). Without a vigorous political culture where participation is valued, a modern form of despotism (Tocqueville's "soft" despotism) will result. These three themes or malaises, then, according to Taylor are the results of our individualistic thinking.

Taylor continues by stating that an offshoot of such individualism is relativism based on the belief that one ought not to challenge another's values. The principle is something like this:

> Everyone has a right to develop their own form of life, grounded on their own sense of what is really important or of value. People are called upon to be true to themselves and to seek their own self-fulfilment. What this consists of, each must, in the last instance, determine for him-or herself. No one else can or should try to dictate its content. (p. 14)

This individualism, Taylor continues, "involves a centring of the self and a concomitant shutting out, or even unawareness, of the greater issues or concerns that transcend the self, be they religious, political, historical. As a consequence, life is narrowed or flattened" (p. 14). Although we have gained our supposed freedom, the cost has been great and we have lost much of the fullness of human experience. One of the more comprehensive examinations of American culture and individualism is found in Habits of the Heart by Robert Bellah and his associates (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). The central premise flowing throughout this book based to a great extent on Alexis de Tocqueville's nineteenth century assessment of America, Democracy in America, is that many of America's deepest problems are a result of the individualistic core lying at the centre of American culture. A current focus is on finding oneself, yet, even those with this focus on the isolated self "are troubled by the nihilism they sense there and eager to find a way of overcoming the emptiness of purely arbitrary 'values'" (p. 84). According to Bellah, such a perspective along with the decline of traditional supportive relationships has led to the emergence of a "therapeutic culture" in which psychotherapy serves as a model relationship. Yet "the very language of therapeutic relationship seems to undercut the possibility of other than self-interested relationships" (p. 139). Thus, our culture has

ingrained in us that the best solution to our problems is individual(istic) therapy as opposed to interdependent relationships as was common in pre-twentieth century America.

Furthermore, Bellah states that American society has focused on increasing freedom, wealth, and power. For more than a hundred years, the American middle class "has imagined that the virtual meaning of life lies in the acquisition of ever-increasing status, income, and authority, from which genuine freedom is supposed to come" (p. 284). What has resulted is the "cardinal sin" of putting "our own good, as individuals, as groups, as a nation, ahead of the common good" (p. 285). The consequence is an internal incoherence in American society that has left this society on the brink of disaster.

Donohue (1990) also affords an intriguing perspective on the state of current society. He sees the emerging prominence of the helping professions along with the many social problems in American society (e.g., child abuse, runaways, homelessness, divorce, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS) as being indicative that "something has gone wrong" (p. 3). If a free and democratic society results in psychological and social disorders, then "freedom becomes an empty gesture. . . . Liberty was meant to be enjoyed, not endured" (p. 3). Donohue traces these psychological and social disorders to a flawed conception of freedom. Our culture defines freedom as being without constraint, an idea based in part on John Stuart Mill's "one very simple principle." The "neo-Millian" perspective of this principle--

> that short of directly harming another person every individual should be accorded total freedom to do as he wishes--has proven to be the most seductive and irresistible doctrine of our time. Even those who never heard of Mill understand exactly what this doctrine means: it means (a) the individual should triumph over society, (b) moral neutrality should triumph over a moral hierarchy, and (c) self-actualization should triumph over self-discipline. (p. 6)

Donohue believes that the idea of absolute freedom or freedom without constraint is a cruel hoax bought by those seeking self-fulfillment. He quotes Aristotle who said "Every man should be responsible to others, nor should any be allowed to do just as he pleases; for where absolute freedom is allowed there is nothing to restrain the evil which is inherent in man" (p. 7). Yet in our society, personal rights are more important than responsibility to others.

Today, we are less accountable to fewer people resulting in less reason for individual responsibility and constraint. Community which Donohue sees as "the staple ingredient of a well-balanced person" (p. 8) has been weakened and diminished. Instead of public good and responsibility, the emphasis has been placed (to the level of absolutes) on individual rights, unquestioned tolerance of others, and unrestrained pluralism where public interest is discarded in favour of personal matters or private interest.

> The evidence is mounting that the new freedom, whether expressed in its freedom-as-rights form, or tendered as the doctrine of moral neutrality, is incompatible with the social and cultural bases of a free society. That individuals are deserving of rights is not the issue; no friend of liberty would ever suggest otherwise. The issue at hand is whether a free society can be expected to exist when individuals become so preoccupied with salvaging their rights that they lose interest in assuming their responsibilities. At stake is a respectable level of civility and community, without which pursuits of freedom cannot exist at all. (p. 37).

This account of our society could easily continue, going into greater detail by examining the writings of Christopher Lasch (1977, 1979), Allan Bloom (1987), those included within the collection edited by Donald Gelpi (1989), the most recent offering of Robert Bellah and associates (1991), Daniel Bell (1976) and many others. But the point should be clear. Many are concerned with the state of society and envision a need for radical reform. We have become a society of individualists, striving for our own good rather than for the good of the whole. Traditional values and morals are eroded and relativism is rampant. The consensus among these writers is that unless we change, our psychological and social crisis will continue.

Chapter 3

The Foundations of Method

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

> As long as there has been a social science, the expectation has been that it would turn from its humanistic infancy to the maturity of hard science, thereby leaving behind its dependence on value, judgment, and individual insight. The dream of modern Western man to be freed from his passions, his unconscious, his history, and his traditions through the liberating use of reason has been the deepest theme of contemporary social science thought. Perhaps the deepest theme of the twentieth century, however, has been the shattering of the triumphalist view of history bequethed to us by the nineteenth. What Comte saw as an inevitable achievement of man, positive reason, Weber saw as an iron cage. (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979, p. 1)

As this quotation suggests, we are unable to separate ourselves and our lives from our scientific investigation. Logical positivist social science seeks to decontextualize facts (Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988) while, as Gergen (1988) states, mainstream psychology has been "enamoured with the possibility of viewing humans as somewhat more complex forms of the laboratory animal" (p. 28). According to Wilhelm Dilthey (the key historical figure in reforming the social sciences) a comprehensive social science needs to do more than simply map the causal relations among human actions (Woolfolk, 1992). Dilthey's perspective is that the social sciences are an attempt to understand rather than explain life. Fittingly, our approach must be significantly different from the natural sciences (Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988). Our data consist of meanings, intentions, plans, ideas, and purposes. "Since the meanings that attach to our construals and conduct are integral elements of thought and action, they cannot be removed from our explanations without irretrievably losing the essence of these phenomena" (pp. 8-9). As a result, I am convinced of the necessity of using a qualitative methodology--in this case, hermeneutics--as the basis for this research. It restores dignity to human beings by looking at persons in their social and cultural context (Gergen, 1988). Removing the phenomenon from its source removes the influence of the context on the phenomenon.

This does not suggest that hermeneutics takes the opposite extreme from objective science and is a form of

relativism similar to social constructivism as some would argue (e.g., Fishman, 1991). For the social constructivist, truth is determined by social consensus. For the hermeneuticist, truth is preserved in a meaningful way, charting a course between the extremes of relativism and objectivism (Woolfolk, 1992). The emphasis is to maintain meaning in the phenomenon being studied while holding it up to the cogent critique of objectivism. Although pretensions to certainty are put aside, the attempt continues to maintain scientific truth. Empirical truth is sought, however we are no longer using objectivist epistemology.

The qualitative methodology used in this research will be an analysis of the writings of Jean Vanier using hermeneutical principles as outlined in recent behavioural scientific literature. Although the hermeneutical process lacks a rigid structure, I will attempt to outline the procedure that I will follow in order to interpret and analyze Vanier's writings.

Hermeneutics

The term "hermeneutics" is derived from the Greek verb, "hermeneuein," meaning to interpret (Sylvester, 1990). The methodology is most appropriate for the interpretation and understanding of "recorded expressions of human experience" (Tappan, 1990, p. 239). In the past, it has most frequently been associated with the interpretation by scholars of God's meaning in Biblical text (Jackson & Patton, 1992). More recently, however, the use of hermeneutics has been applied to the interpreting of human behaviour. Heidegger (1927) proposed that the hermeneutic method is the best method for examining human action. By considering human behaviour as text, one is able to understand and analyze action "that is grounded in considering such action as having a semantic rather than a logical or causal organization" (Packer, 1985, p. 1081). In following this procedure, I am not intending to uncover universal truths or laws as empirical science would suggest, but rather to explicate context and world (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1979). "What the hermeneutic investigator studies, then, is what people actually do when they are engaged in the everyday practical tasks of life rather than in the detached contemplation that characterizes pencil-and-paper tasks and most interview situations" (Packer, 1985, p. 1086). My intention is to uncover how Vanier's writings about community in general and his descriptions of his L'Arche communities can be applied to our North American society as a whole.

The Hermeneutic Circle

As has been stated, the hermeneutic process is not one that can be clearly articulated. However, the basis of this methodology can be found in what has been called the "hermeneutic circle" (Bouchard & Gurette, 1991; Geertz, 1979; Gergen, 1988; Patton, 1990; Taylor, 1979; Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988). Originally articulated by Schleiermacher (1977), the basic premise of the hermeneutical circle is the process of moving back and forth between that which is known or global knowledge (the whole) and the local detail found in the text (the part) (Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988). The intent is to examine the part and whole in such a way that they are integrated by bringing both into view simultaneously. "We seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual perpetual motion, into explications of one another" (Geertz, 1979, p. 239). Facts found in the part (the text) do not stand alone--they must be examined in light of the context and the interpreter, for they are constituted by them. The hermeneutical circle then, examines the contextual nature of knowledge. But it is also realized that the whole is made up of the parts. Thus the need for continual movement between the parts and the whole. In other words,

> Any act, looked at in isolation from its situation, is likely to be ambiguous. . . . The hermeneutic paradigm takes as its starting point the fact that, despite the ambiguities, any observer has a preliminary practical understanding of what the people studied are "up to." (Packer, 1985, p. 1081)

The result of following the procedure of the hermeneutical circle is that texts that have been unclear and prone to misinterpretation are made clear (Taylor, 1979). Success is presumably measured by the lack of obscurity, contradiction, and mystery remaining in the text after it has been interpreted. The hermeneuticist, according to Taylor, must show in convincing fashion how he or she has read the text and demonstrate why the text must be interpreted in the manner which he or she proposes.

A concise overview of this process is afforded by Jackson and Patton (1992). While acknowledging the philosophical assumption of nonlinearity upon which the hermeneutic process is based, they present the following three steps as being helpful in understanding the process.

1). The initial step is to take "an unfocused overview of the text" (p. 203). The "text" in this

perspective can be composed of any medium that accurately records the phenomena in its context. Thus, video and audio recordings, transcripts and the like can be considered as texts. In order to take an unfocused view, the researcher must clear his or her mind of a priori assumptions. "That is, having abandoned prior explanations of the phenomena, investigators can begin to understand the subjective meaning of the acts from the perspective of the participants" (p. 203). Empathy is used in order to illuminate the participants' meaning.

2). The second step is to begin "interpretation through successive 'readings' of the material" (p. 203). Through a spiraling process, the researcher considers newly illuminated aspects of the text, challenging them, and revising his or her understanding. This process refines the interpretations making them increasingly valid. The interpretations are held up against three criteria as outlined by Kvale (1987). "(a) they correspond to the reality of the world as understood and accepted by the scientific community, (b) they are internally coherent--the ideas have logical integrity within the given context, and (c) they demonstrate a pragmatic quality" (Jackson & Patton, 1992, p. 204).

3). The findings must be conveyed accurately and clearly through language, using words rather than numbers to do so.

The hermeneutic process, then, brings "that which is alienated by distance or distortion, to be heard as in a new voice" (Ringma & Brown, 1991, p. 57). It is this basic procedure that will be used in order to examine the importance of Jean Vanier's writings to our society today.

A Cautionary Remark

With this articulated procedure in mind, it is, however, necessary to make a cautionary remark regarding the interpretation to follow. As Robert Bellah (1979) wrote in defence of hermeneutic interpretation:

> There is no scientific Mount Olympus from which to view "objectively" the matters with which my essay is concerned. Of course this does not mean that my interpretations are "subjective" either. They are in the public domain, and their validity can be argued with reference to the primary texts which they are interpreting. But "validity" again will be in terms of a point of view, a tradition of interpretation, which may or may not be the same as mine. And the differences are not merely

> "academic." They are derived from the very conflict of interpretations that characterizes American society. (p. 362)

There may not be consensus on my conclusions from Vanier's writings. But what will be evident is that I have followed a logical and valid process in reaching my conclusions and that this process cannot be successfully argued against or dismissed.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

As previously stated, my intention was to uncover what the writings of Jean Vanier indicate about the healing qualities found in community. To accomplish this, hermeneutical principles previously described were applied to the texts of Vanier. Through the use of the hermeneutic circle, themes emerged which summarized the various aspects of Vanier's community mentality. Within these themes, the crucial elements for psychological health were found, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. Community, according to Vanier, can lead to health. Thus it was my intention to uncover how Vanier's community promotes such psychological well-being. In addition to this, once the themes were analyzed, it was necessary to examine the specific ways in which Vanier understands that these themes promote health. Consequently, a new definition of psychological health has emerged.

Procedure for Discerning Themes

According to Taylor (1979), the researcher using hermeneutics must demonstrate in convincing fashion how he or she has read the text and demonstrate why the text can be interpreted in the manner proposed. To accomplish this, I have followed the procedure proposed by Jackson and Patton (1992) outlined in the methodology chapter. This involved the steps of taking an unfocused overview of the text, followed by a spiralling process of interpretation through successive readings, followed by clearly conveyed findings. The result of this process was the emergence of the following themes: spirituality, poverty, authenticity, forgiveness, celebration, altruistic love, and fidelity. Each of these is seen by Vanier as being an important and necessary element of a good community.

Guidelines for Discerning Themes

In order to discern the themes, the following guidelines were applied.

1. Vanier's writings must place a major emphasis on the theme. In other words, the themes must be discussed frequently. An isolated mention of a potential theme does not warrant classification as a theme regardless of how strongly Vanier advocates that potential theme in the isolated context.
2. The theme must be supported in Vanier's other writings. To be classified as a theme, it must be found

in other books by the author, given the appropriate context. Some of Vanier's books are based on spiritual talks addressed to priests and ministers encouraging them in their faith. Such a context may not include adequate support for all the themes because the focus is predominantly on spirituality rather than on other aspects of Vanier's community experience.

3. On occasion, Vanier may write that a potential theme is essential for community. This provides support for a theme but does not provide an adequate basis for classification as a theme. Occasionally, Vanier states that something is "at the heart of community" yet seldom refers to it elsewhere in his writings. Such statements are not acceptable as "themes."

4. The emergent themes must together account for an appropriate summary of Vanier's writings. With the exception of specific and isolated incidents, Vanier's conception of community must be adequately represented in the themes.

These guidelines served as the basis for identifying themes in the writings.

Steps Taken for Discerning Themes

The actual steps taken to discern the themes were as follows:

1. Overview. The intention was to gain a general understanding of the meaning of the writer. An attempt was made to eliminate previous personal assumptions and prejudices. I did not attempt to identify themes at this point. However, I noted potential themes and set them aside in order that they would not bias further overview reading.

2. I successively read the text, putting an emphasis on the initial identification and examination of potential themes.

3. I successively read the text and analyzed the potential themes within the context of the writings. This was a weeding process in which I identified the themes consistent and supported within the writings, while those potential themes that were not consistent or supported I relegated to the roles of subthemes, supporting points of a theme, or discarded.

4. I successively read the text with the identified themes in mind, and analyzed the accuracy of the themes in the overall representation of the text as a whole.

Subthemes

The purpose of the subthemes was to add clarity to the themes. Some of the themes were broad and could

serve as categories within which to classify more concise themes. I chose to maintain the broader themes as they best described Vanier's writings. The subthemes then, focus on aspects of the broader theme. They are actual themes found within the context of the broader themes.

I discerned subthemes in a manner similar to the broad themes with one difference. Rather than regarding all of Vanier's writings as the text as I had done with the themes, I used the writings on a particular theme as the text from which to discern the subthemes. Thus I discerned the subthemes found within the theme of Authenticity for example, through a process of examining the texts on authenticity. I followed the same guidelines and steps for discerning subthemes as I used for discerning themes with the exception of the extent of the text used.

Biases and Assumptions

I have attempted to examine Vanier's writings with objectivity and to present them in a thematic and accurate way. I have immersed myself in his writings, attempting to get into his head and heart to understand how the various pieces of his perspective fit together. However, as objective as one attempts to be, interpretation is seen through personal lenses that are made up of the biases and assumptions that one holds. Patton (1990) writes that "one must know about the researcher as well as the researched to place any qualitative study in a proper, hermeneutic context" (p. 85). In this thesis, I am reporting the perspectives of Jean Vanier on community, interpreted through my own situational context. As a result, it is necessary to outline the biases and assumptions that may or may not have affected the interpretation of Vanier's writings.

1. Community is positive.

I believe that community as defined in the review of the literature is positive for most people. As I have previously demonstrated, many academic writers are of the opinion that one of the fundamental elements lacking in today's society is community. Thus, when I read about community, I see it as something that could be implemented as a solution to many of the problems in society. I do not see it as a cure-all, but I believe that it is a necessity in order to have psychologically healthy individuals living in a psychologically healthy society. Thus it is necessary to examine the results in light of this bias.

2. People desire psychological health.

The assumption of this thesis is that community

promotes psychological health. Although, as has been seen in the review of the literature, psychological health is difficult to define, it is something that most people desire and strive towards. Although the costs of attaining greater health may seem to outweigh the benefits of receiving greater health, people desire to grow and to improve themselves as humans.

3. A Judeo-Christian worldview.

In examining the writings, I was influenced and limited by my Judeo-Christian worldview. I believe this worldview provides the basis for an accurate philosophy of life and understanding of the world's events, as well as serving as a useful guide to solving problems within our society. As will be evident, Vanier shares this worldview and takes it to a deeply spiritual level. Because of my worldview with the same bias, my tendency was to place a greater emphasis on this aspect of Vanier's writings than someone with another worldview. My task then, was not to place a greater emphasis on Vanier's spirituality than was warranted.

4. Vanier is an adequate source.

Because of his experience of living in community and the apparent success he has had in working with the mentally handicapped, I deem Vanier an expert in the field. His views on community are widely accepted by both those working with the mentally handicapped (Harris, 1987; Shearer, 1974; Sumarah, 1987) as well as by those in leadership in many Christian denominations (Todd, 1994; Vanier, 1992a). He is not someone who has only observed community and written about it, but rather he has been immersed in community for many years. Due to the success of his community, his experience in community, and his academic qualifications, I believe that Vanier is an excellent witness of the benefits of community.

Biography of Jean Vanier

It was important to examine the context of Vanier's writings. In order to work from an hermeneutical perspective, the interpretation of the text must be presented within the context that it was written (Messer et al., 1988). The themes and meanings found in the hermeneutical study must be examined within the the sociohistorical setting as experienced by the participant in the study. This necessitates a brief description of Vanier, the "L'Arche" communities, and the motivation that led to their formation. (For a comprehensive overview of Jean Vanier and L'Arche, see Spink, 1991).

Jean Vanier, born 1928, is the son of Georges

Vanier, the Canadian diplomat who later served as the Governor-General of Canada from 1959 until his death in 1967. In 1964, Jean purchased a home in Trosly-Breuil, France, a village located approximately 90 kilometres north of Paris. Having given up a job as a philosophy lecturer at the University of Toronto, he moved into the home with two mentally handicapped men from a local psychiatric hospital (Shearer, 1976). Desiring to live a life of simplicity based on the Beatitudes found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount expressed through reaching out to the poor and less fortunate, Vanier's idea was to welcome "anyone who wished to come, be they the very elderly, drug addicts or simply 'gentlemen of the road'" (Spink, 1991, p. 46). An early newsletter expresses the purpose of L'Arche:

> Vanier is convinced that if the handicapped are unable to find their stability in modern society, which is becoming more and more complicated with its bureaucracy and techniques, they can find true human and spiritual growth in a family-like environment. L'Arche wants to create homes where life is focused on service to those who are the poorest of the poor in this twentieth century. L'Arche does not want to be a centre where those who have been rejected are simply kept or cared for; it wants to be a place where they can truly grow and develop according to their specific qualities and capacities. (Vanier, 1992, p. 24).

With his Christian faith serving as the motivating force in his decision to embark on this venture, Vanier's community rapidly spread from one home to many throughout the world. Currently, there are L'Arche communities in more than one hundred cities in some twenty-three countries.

L'Arche (which means "the Ark", see Spink, 1991, p. 45ff for the full significance of the title) continues to centre its work on the "the poorest of the poor"--the mentally handicapped (Vanier, 1992b). Through a host of volunteer assistants, many of whom simply want to experience "true" community, and many of whom are seeking to sort out their lives, L'Arche provides what many refer to as a healing experience for both the mentally handicapped and the assistants (Coppersmith, 1984; Harris, 1987; Sumarah, 1983; Sumarah, 1987; Vanier, 1979). This, then, is the essence of L'Arche, with the external focus on serving the poor and the internal focus on loving one another despite the failings and weaknesses that each one has (Vanier, 1979).

Chapter 5

Findings

Theme 1: Spirituality

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when men hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.
Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,
because great is your reward in heaven.
(Jesus, Luke 6:20-23, The Beatitudes)

The communities of L'Arche are based on Jesus' teachings of the Beatitudes (Vanier, 1971, 1975, 1979, 1985, 1992b, 1992c). The Beatitudes serve as the reason why Vanier embarked into community life and they continue to be the prominent motivator for his continued involvement in community. When Vanier began L'Arche, his desire was to live the Beatitudes and to follow Jesus Christ more closely (1979). In examining his writings, one must bear this framework in mind. "Everything I say about life in community in these pages is inspired by my faith in Jesus" (p. 3) he writes in Community and Growth. Thus, what is written in the pages that follow has its basis in this Christian context. Vanier examines community through spiritual glasses. Accordingly, this analysis retains the undercurrent of a Christian worldview based primarily upon the teachings of Jesus.

Definition

The term "spirituality" can be defined as "the life principle that pervades a person's entire being, one's volitional, emotional, moral-ethical, intellectual, and physical dimensions and generates a capacity for transcendent values. . . the spiritual dimension of a person integrates and transcends the biological and psychological nature" (Burns, 1991). This "life principle" then, serves as the guide by which one lives his or her life. Others, such as Lannert (1991), have offered much broader definitions of spirituality:

"Spirituality is the courage to look within and to trust" (p. 69), but such a definition is too broad and nonspecific to be of use.

Spirituality as used in this discussion is also adequately captured within Allport's notion of Intrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967). This form of religiosity which makes up one of the two scales on the Intrinsic and Extrinsic scales can be defined as follows: "Persons scoring high on the Intrinsic scale are described as individuals who value their religion, who strive to transcend self-centered needs and who are genuinely committed to religion" (Bernt, 1989, p. 663).

Thus whatever one's religion might be, it plays an integrated role in his or her life. As can be seen from these definitions, the person who is intrinsically religious is guided and motivated by their religion, or life principle, which permeates aspects of one's life. This then would fit the definition of spirituality. The person who is intrinsically religious is spiritual and the person who is spiritual is intrinsically religious. For both, life is organized around guiding principles.

Vanier's spirituality motivates his actions. His faith in Jesus has resulted in actions that are in accord with Jesus' teachings. His actions are an attempt to live out this guiding life principle. This is the reason why I am examining the theme of Spirituality initially. It permeates and influences all other themes. An adequate understanding of Vanier's spiritual perspective and its role in his communities is necessary so that its infiltration into the ensuing themes will not seem peculiar nor out of place. Jesus' teachings are the raison d'etre for L'Arche. One must come to at least a cursory understanding of Vanier's spirituality in order to understand and accept the succeeding themes.

The Role of Spirituality in Vanier's Community

The role of spirituality in Vanier's community has been evident from the initial formation of L'Arche. When Vanier decided to move into a home in Trosly-Breuil, France, with two mentally handicapped individuals, he knew that it was an irreversible decision (Spink, 1991). By Vanier's own admission, he went ahead with this act of compassion because of his belief that Jesus wanted it. He went into this venture with naivete, believing that God wanted him to serve the poor in this way. With little money and with little vision for the future direction of his community, he invested his life in the lives of the mentally handicapped, those whom he considers the poorest of the

poor (1971). The founding of L'Arche continues to exemplify the role of spirituality in these communities. There continues to be the belief that "Jesus wants it" and that this movement is of God. With this trust and faith in God as the basis, Vanier's communities have grown and continue to expand. For him then, God "is at the heart of community" (1979, p. 113).

Similarly, the role of spirituality is also evident in the way that Vanier views the communities as an expression of his desire to grow in his understanding of God: "Jesus is master of community and it is his teaching which leads to the creation of Christian communities" (1979, p. 247). In his attempt to live out the teachings of Jesus and the Beatitudes, he has been drawn to reach out to the poor. The poor are the ones whom Jesus spent his time with, and he taught that he was hidden in the faces of the poor (1979, p. 40). Jesus blessed the poor and said that when you serve the poor, you are serving him. Thus, as we will see in greater detail in the following theme, Vanier's spirituality has led him to see the poor as the focal point of community (1992c).

When examined against the backdrop of the complex and oftentimes inconsistent forms of Christianity, religion, and spirituality evident today, Vanier's spirituality comes across as being a "simple" spirituality. His goal is to live like Jesus and to follow his teachings at a simple level consisting of loving the poor. It consists of following the example of Jesus as described in the Bible rather than of a theological discussion resulting in complexity and knowledge.

Subtheme: Dependence On God

Central to Vanier's spirituality is the concept of becoming weak so that God can work through people. Community in his mind is an impossible task if based solely on human effort:

> These people would never have chosen to live with each other. Humanly speaking, it seems an impossible challenge. But it is precisely because it is impossible that they have an inner conviction that God has chosen them to live in this community. And so the impossible becomes possible. They no longer rely on their own human abilities or natural sympathies, but on their Father who has called them to live together. He will give them the new heart and Spirit which will enable them all to become witnesses to love. In fact, the more impossible it is in human terms, the more of a sign it is that

their love comes from God and that Jesus is living. (p. 22).

These impossible challenges are what Vanier sees as opportunities for God's strength to be displayed. They are opportunities that encourage one to depend on God. When he opened up a new community in India, Vanier wrote that it seemed "like pure folly" (1992b, p. 97). He and his colleagues did not know the language, the traditions, or even have a place in which to set up the community. If removed from the context of his spirituality, Vanier's actions would be considered nonsensical. But he had the belief that God would act through this display of weakness providing that they remained "anchored in him" (p. 97). A short while later, he wrote in a letter that "the Spirit is using the community there in a most wonderful way, His strength shining forth from their weakness" (p. 137). For Vanier, there is the open acknowledgment that he is weak and incapable of living successfully in community on his own. It is only through dependence on God's Spirit, he believes, that allows him to enter community and be able to love those with whom he associates (1975).

When Vanier examines human nature (a topic that I will return to in greater detail when I examine the theme of Authenticity) he sees it as sinful and wounded (1985). Humans seek to protect themselves from being vulnerable and flee from inner pain, evil, and darkness. In addition, human hearts our fearful and fragile. Essentially then according to Vanier, humankind is weak. Yet it is loved by God. This realization is tantamount to the healing and growth that can take place in community. People are weak, Vanier believes, but God values them and calls them his children. When this weakness is realized, it reveals a need to become dependent on God, for people cannot succeed in this life on their own. With this realization can come a profound understanding of God. Vanier (1992a) tells of a moving incident involving one of the mentally handicapped members of his community:

> Our people are close to God, and yet they are so little and so poor. They have known rejection and have suffered a great deal. I am always moved as I hear them speak of Jesus. When somebody asked one of our men, Peter, if he liked to pray, he said that he did. So the person continued and asked him what he did when he prayed. He replied: "I listen." Then the person asked what God says to him. Peter, a man with Down's Syndrome, looked up and said: "He just says, 'You are my beloved

son.'" (pp. 22-23).

This understanding that God is evident and alive in the weak and poor is crucial to our understanding of Vanier's spirituality. He takes to heart the Biblical sayings that the poor will shame the wise and that in weakness, God's power is revealed. One's dependence on God is amplified as the realization that he or she is weak and poor becomes increasingly apparent. This realization necessitates a spirituality that views weakness and poverty as desirable traits leading to a deeper level of spirituality. Few people in our society desire such traits, and as a result, our understanding of this aspect of Vanier's spirituality is difficult to grasp. It seems foreign to the acceptable desires of our modern, success-oriented society.

Yet it also indicates a comprehensive "life principle" around which aspects of life are organized. This principle may mean little to those who do not adhere to it, but it indicates a spirituality that "pervades a person's entire being" (Burns, 1991).

This discussion on the role of the poor in community continues within the examination of the following theme of Poverty.

Subtheme: Changed Values

I have suggested that Vanier's purpose in community is to follow the example of Jesus as seen in his service to the poor and his desire to welcome them into community. The reason he formed L'Arche was because Jesus wanted him to. In an early letter explaining the purposes of L'Arche, he wrote that "we want to love one another as Christ taught us: gently, humbly and mercifully. Love is the distinctive feature of the message of the gospels" (1992b, p. 21). In another early letter, he wrote that "the gospels have been the source of our inspiration leading us towards the 'poor.' It is this deep respect of each person that is at the centre of the message of Jesus" (p. 27). In his longing to follow Jesus, he has adopted a new value system which includes reaching out to the poor and, in turn, becoming poor himself. Jesus brought the good news to the poor, not to those who serve the poor (1992a). If one truly seeks after God, Vanier suggests, then he or she must become poor. Vanier views this poverty from both the perspective of it being an internal poverty (acknowledging one's weaknesses) and an external poverty (material circumstances). "The kingdom of God belongs to the poor" (p. 20) he writes. If people want to be followers of Jesus, then they too must become poor both inwardly in their attitudes and

externally in their living circumstances. Such a desire for poverty flies quickly into the face of the values predominant in our society.

As a result of this desire, Vanier is quick to point out the detrimental effects of our affluent North American culture. The spirituality of L'Arche is accountable for a set of values that sharply contrast the values held by our culture. In his attempt to follow Jesus, Vanier has adopted a new set of values, contrary to the values of our culture (1992c). These values based on Jesus' teaching provide "a new vision of and for the world and of what it means to be human" (p. 13). According to our society's values, people are to seek to rise up in power, to be honored, to compete against others and to succeed regardless of the cost to their fellow human. Vanier believes that this is the reason that "there are so many disputes, rivalries and wars, so much fear, jealousy, hatred, aggression and oppression; everyone, every group wants to be the first, the best, the most honored" (p. 13). Yet in the spirituality of Jesus, humans are called to go down the ladder, to become weak, to let others go ahead. This is a profoundly different set of values. Jesus is enigmatic to people because he chose to serve rather than to be served (1975). Western culture views such a set of values as being strange and even ridiculous. Yet, Vanier views the world's values with similar chagrin:

> We all have to choose between two ways of being crazy: the foolishness of the Gospel and the non-sense of the values of our world. The Gospel is crazy: it sees in the poor a sign and a sacrament of God, thus revealing the mystery of Jesus and leading us to a true inner freedom, through a community life with celebrations and relationships. (1985, p. 174)

These changed values are necessary for community to be effective in welcoming the poor, in reaching a stage where it becomes a place of unselfish love and where people are accepted regardless of their weaknesses and failings.

Subtheme: Community Exemplifies God's Love

Vanier is striving to follow Jesus and to live as Jesus did in service to the poor and weak. Similarly, his communities are striving towards this same love as displayed by Jesus. Frequently in his writings, he speaks of the love needed to heal personal wounds and to allow one another to grow together in unity. At times he is referring to the love found in community while at

other times he is referring to God's love. The love of God and the love of the community seem almost interchangeable in Vanier's mind. As a result, the love found in community can be seen to exemplify God's love.

Although the love found in community is imperfect and bound by our humanity, Vanier essentially sees these two loves, at least on the level of ideals, as being parallel. Communities are an earthly expression of God's love. They should be "a sign that love is possible and that there is hope" (1979, p. 57). Thus, communities need to be a sign to humankind that there is an alternative to the egoistic society in which we live and that love is possible among people. Such an alternative will always be a source of unease, or a stumbling block for society. "The people around it will very quickly feel challenged. So the community will either be rejected because it reveals the egoisms in people's hearts, or attractive because people sense in it a source of life and warmth" (1979, p. 129). In the same way, people rejected and felt ill at ease around the love of God in the form of Jesus too, Vanier concludes.

This metaphor or parallel process of community exemplifying God's love can best be understood when one examines the impact that Vanier believes God's love has on us:

> The religion of Jesus is truly good news. It is not, first of all, a series of laws which one must obey. It is an experience of the loving call of Jesus, a meeting with him in faith and tenderness. This encounter, which opens us up to the universe and to the Father, reveals that we are precious in the eyes of God. The negative image we have of ourselves is gradually transformed. When we discover we are loved by the Father, we can begin to trust ourselves; our hearts are on the road to being healed. This experience gives hope. (1985, p. 23)

By experiencing God's love, one is transformed and begins the healing process. The same is true for one experiencing the love of community. For example, Vanier believes that God alone can change hearts and heal people's emotional beings through the revelation that they are of value and loved by God (1985). Yet he also writes that community is essential for healing to take place (1979). In the same way that God's love is liberating (1985), community is also liberating (1979). One must encounter Jesus and his forgiveness in order to feel able and willing to release the barriers that keep him or her from others (1975). But the support and

acceptance of the community is also necessary (1975). From Vanier's perspective then, God's love is revealed through human actions. Community is to be seen as an earthly example of God's love.

Subtheme: Prayer

Until now, I have examined spirituality in its role as the basis of community evident in the subthemes of dependence on God, changed values, and community as an example of God's love. At this point, however, I am about to examine a concrete and particular subtheme of Vanier's spirituality--prayer. This deeply spiritual action is one which Vanier deems as essential for his communities.

Vanier believes that prayer is an essential prerequisite to serving the poor (1979). If one has not nurtured his or her emotional or spiritual life in times of silence before God, then that person is not going to be as effective in service to the poor and weak within community. If the motivation for living in community is spiritual as Vanier suggests, then these deeply spiritual times of refocusing and renewing energy are necessary.

> Prayer is an attitude of trust in our Father, seeking his will, seeking to be a presence of love for brothers and sisters. Each of us must know how to rest and unwind in silence and contemplation, heart to heart with God. (p. 140)

Two types of prayer are found in Vanier's writings: individual prayer (praying alone) and communal prayer (community members praying together). I will examine each of these in turn.

Individual Prayer

The purpose of individual prayer according to Vanier is to equip individuals to live with others in community. Because of the spiritual commitment involved in living in Vanier's community, he believes that one must nourish his or her relationship with God above all else in order to serve others. As I will explain under the theme of Forgiveness, individuals need to acknowledge that they are forgiven by God before they are able to forgive others and to accept others' weaknesses. For Vanier, prayer provides the opportunity to come before God and accept his love and forgiveness.

Individual prayer also keeps the focus on what God has called a person to do. Without prayer, an individual is less likely to open up to others and may raise barriers between him or herself and others living in community. "We will lose sight of our priorities and

of the essential" (p. 142). Becoming authentic and loving others altruistically takes effort and requires reliance upon God. In Vanier's view, it is necessary that individual prayer is given an important position within the community.

Communal Prayer

Communal prayer plays many of the same roles as individual prayer in community, but it does this within the context of the group, thus promoting unity. "Communal prayer is an important nourishment. A community which prays together, which enters into silence and adoration, is bound together by the action of the Holy Spirit" (1979, p. 147). The value given to such prayer can be seen by its important role within group activities and celebrations. Nearly all organized events incorporate a time of prayer whether they be the frequent religious services attended or the group get-togethers. Time is always taken to pray for each other, to pray for the community as a whole, and to pray for those who are less fortunate. From Vanier's vantage point, the main purpose of communal prayer is to draw the community together.

Vanier's notion of prayer again departs from a typical North American mentality. While many in our society report praying frequently, their prayers tend to be self-centred cries of helplessness (Why We Pray, 1994). For Vanier, prayer is a time of nourishment, a time to draw closer to God and to become better equipped and motivated to exemplify God's love in relationships with each other.

At this point, I have examined the importance that spirituality plays in Vanier's community. I have shown that spirituality is the basis of this community and that it is the primary motivating factor. As shall be seen, the role of spirituality will reveal itself time and again as I examine the succeeding themes of poverty, authenticity, forgiveness, celebration, altruistic love, and fidelity.

Theme 2: Poverty

I introduced the theme of spirituality by quoting the Beatitudes of Jesus with its emphasis on the poor. Throughout the preceding discussion I have frequently returned to the subject of poverty and serving the poor. The poor are at the heart of Vanier's notion of community and even more so at the heart of his spirituality. This theme builds on the theme of Spirituality and provides clarity to it. As a result, it is important to take a more detailed look at the poverty that Vanier so often writes about.

Recently, Vanier (1992c) wrote a booklet attempting to define the basic elements of the spirituality of L'Arche. Its title, The Poor At the Heart of Community, reveals much about the role of poverty for Vanier. Within this booklet, he revealingly combines the Beatitudes with the "Woes" which follow a few verses later:

> Blessed are the poor, woe to the rich; blessed are the hungry, woe to the filled; blessed are those who weep, woe to those who laugh; blessed are those who are hated; woe to those who are respected; blessed are those who are looked down upon, woe to those of whom everyone speaks highly. (cf Luke 6:21-26).

This passage reveals the stark contrast between the poor and the rich. This spiritual and physical contrast is what motivates the work of Vanier.

In this section, I will examine four subthemes of poverty as portrayed by Vanier: 1. Serving the poor is serving Jesus; 2. The benefits of being poor; 3. The impact of the poor; and 4. The costs involved in serving the poor.

Subtheme: Serving the Poor Is Serving Jesus

Vanier believes that "Jesus is hidden in the faces of the poor" (1979, p. 40). Therefore, any gesture of love and concern shown to the poor, weak, and wounded is a gesture of love shown to him. He goes further when he states that "to live with Jesus is to live with the poor. To live with the poor is to live with Jesus" (p. 40). Because of his belief in the significance of the poor in Jesus' sight, his striving to follow Jesus has led him to serve the poor.

When Vanier speaks of the poor, he is not only referring to those who are financially destitute, but to anyone who has been rejected by society. As a result, he considers the mentally handicapped to be the poorest

of the poor for they have most often been the most rejected members of society (1992b). When Vanier opened the L'Arche community in India, he was excited about welcoming a young man named Dilip. He was happy that the new community would be starting with him because "he is the poorest of the poor, without any family, without anything. Nobody wants him; he is rejected everywhere he goes" (1992b, p. 101). Vanier sees a mystery in the poor based on Jesus' teaching that whatever you do for the least of his brothers, you do for him. Somehow and in someway, within their poverty and despite their wounds, there resides the presence of God (1979). In a society where the poor are often rejected and seen as burdensome, Vanier exalts them and gives them a position at the pinnacle of his spirituality.

Subtheme: The Benefits of the Poor

Vanier seems to almost idealize the poor as being godly and as having much to teach those who are rich. What then do the poor have that the rich do not have--or what benefit do they have from being in poverty?

It must first be stated that Vanier does not idealize the poor. "Poor people are hurt; they are in pain. They can be very angry, in revolt or in depression" (1992a, p. 12). Although they have much to offer and much to teach about spiritual things, there is immense pain surrounding their circumstances. However, when the perspective of Jesus' teaching is taken, it is the poor who are most precious and close to God, not the rich and powerful (1979). He commands individuals to humble themselves and become like little children (Luke 9:46-48). These, in God's eyes, are the greatest. Similarly, Vanier writes that Jesus' message was announced to the poor. They are at the heart of Jesus' value structure (1985).

Another benefit that Vanier sees in the poor is that their poverty forces them to keep their focus on spiritual things:

> There is a mystery in the secret strength of those whose bodies are broken, who seem to do nothing all day, but who remain in the presence of God. Their immobility obliges them to keep their minds and hearts fixed on the essential, on the source of life itself. Their suffering and agony bears fruit; they give life. (1979, p. 112).

There is a sort of maturity given to the poor, Vanier (1985) believes, an understanding of God and his ways. Without this, there would be little reason for them to continue living. Because they know they can reach few of the goals of this world, they seem somehow obliged to

focus on the essential and the eternal--to focus on Jesus and the spiritual (1975). Once again Vanier's perspective is so deeply entwined with his spirituality that it opposes much of what we accept. To see the poor and rejected as having special privileges and understanding beyond that of "normal" society, is an idea that, while not inconceivable, has not been seriously considered. For many of us, to see the poor and handicapped as anything but deficient requires a changed worldview based on something other than society's values.

Again it must be expressed that we should not idealize the poor. They have spiritual advantages over the rich, yet it is because they are in such pain and have so little to gain from this world that God has equipped them with the things of the eternal.

Subtheme: The Impact of the Poor

When people decide to reach out to the poor and serve them, an impact is made on these helpers' lives. Vanier (1979) believes that "the poor man has a mysterious power: in his weakness he is able to open hardened hearts and reveal the sources of living water within them" (p. 44). In some way, the poor person is able to open up one's capacity for love. Coming in contact with the poor enables the helpers to move from their egoism and to become more authentic and open with each other (1985), for the poor have little to hide and persuade us to live with a similar lack of pretension. Through this interaction, the hearts of the rich are healed and softened and able to see the deeper importance of the spiritual side of life. Vanier considers this a sort of emotional or spiritual nourishment. We must be in contact with the poor if we are to be healthy (1979).

Another benefit of reaching out to the poor is that we receive God's blessing. Vanier is fond of quoting from Isaiah chapter 58 where God tells his people that his desire is that they would reach out to the poor:

> If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, your light will rise in the darkness and your darkest hours will be like noon. Yahweh will always guide you and will satisfy your needs in a scorched land; he will give strength to your bones and you will be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring, whose waters never run dry. Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt; you will build on age-old foundations. You will be called "breach menders", "restorers of streets to be lived on." (Isaiah 58:10-12)

Vanier takes a remarkably literal interpretation of the Bible, and rather than discussing the merits of such an interpretation, he simply lives what the Bible teaches. As a result, he has immersed himself in the poor and has himself become poor. He has found immense personal satisfaction and peace, and a freedom to love beyond what he believed he was capable of. Although there is great personal cost in serving the poor, he has reaped spiritual benefits.

Subtheme: The Costs of Serving the Poor

There is a cost associated with reaching out to the poor as Vanier himself can testify. Having grown up in a wealthy and influential home, his father serving as the Governor General of Canada and he himself receiving a PhD in philosophy, he willingly gave up this prestige and prosperity in order to live with the poor and to live out his calling with them. The poor have changed Vanier. He no longer sympathizes with the wealthy. He cannot understand how "we in our countries continue to live in luxury while there are so many poor people here living in utter poverty" (1992b, p. 129). He believes that our society, supposedly founded upon Christian beliefs, has rejected the poor.

It is interesting to note the impact that the poor have had on the rest of Vanier's family. This aristocratic family which includes a PhD, an MD, and the wife of the former symbolic head of Canada (George Vanier died in 1967), has given up the power and prestige it had in order to live with the poor. Vanier's sister, a physician has founded a L'Arche community in England, while his mother has moved to France to live with the communities there. Although they at one time felt Vanier was naive and crazy to embark upon such a venture, they experienced the call of the poor and the value of the poor during visits to L'Arche. A a result, they have given up much power, prestige, and possessions in order to follow Jesus.

Two of Vanier's books, Be Not Afraid (1975) and Tears of Silence (1970) examine the gulf that exists between the rich and the poor. These two worlds are ones that never meet, "divided by a gulf called fear" (1970, p. 88). The reason for the existence of this gulf is a fear of having to change:

> The poor man--the weak man, the man who cries out because he is in need--is a danger to the rich man, the man who is self-satisfied and shut up in his liberty and his pride. If the rich man starts to approach the poor man, he cannot remain rich. He has to change. He has to open himself and he has

to share. (1975, p. 19).

Our wealth is challenged by the person in poverty. If we are to reach out to the poor we must change. "We cannot say, 'Oh God, feed the hungry,' when we are not doing it ourselves" (p. 122). For Vanier, the logic is simple: If we are concerned about poverty, then we must change; if we are following Jesus, then we must serve the poor. The cost involved to live such a lifestyle is inconceivable to many of us. We might admire Vanier's lifestyle--such commitment to following one's principles and spirituality--but few are willing to sacrifice so much for their beliefs.

For Vanier, community is dependent upon how one responds to the call of the poor. The poor are at the heart of community and at the heart of the spiritual basis for community. As a result, the notion of poverty is found as well in the themes to follow. In many ways, poverty and spirituality are synonyms, both expressing Vanier's desire to follow Jesus. Following Jesus requires a change; it means that one is required to live in communion with others and to reach out to the poor (1992a). It means rejecting the values of this world and following the values laid out by Jesus in the Beatitudes.

Theme 3: Authenticity

The theme of authenticity is expressed in Vanier's writings as a necessary component of community. Although the word authenticity is only occasionally used by Vanier, it is inferred from a variety of discussions involving terms such as vulnerability, weakness, poverty and humility. It serves as a base upon which the remaining themes are built. Without the conscious attempt of individuals to strive towards authenticity in themselves and in their relationships, community cannot reach its full potential.

Definition

It seems appropriate for an examination of authenticity to begin with a look at Heidegger's understanding of the term. Heidegger suggests authenticity involves "achieving the fullest possible self-understanding and self-control so as to be able to respond to the needs and possibilities of the situation" (Langan, 1992, p. 11). It means "resolving to accept the openness, which paradoxically, one already is. One can be open to other people and to possibilities only when freed from the distortions of egoism. Authenticity means to be most appropriately what one already is" (Zimmerman, 1986, p. xxiv). Finally, cogently stated, Heidegger believed that "to be authentic is to possess oneself as one really is" (Harries, 1978, p. 76).

Authenticity as seen from Vanier's vantage point, can be defined as having to do with accepting ourselves as we are with all of our weaknesses, failings, and problems, realizing that it is okay not to be perfect. It involves striving to become vulnerable, to open oneself up to others, allowing others to see who one is with all the weaknesses and failings. It means removing the image, reputation, facade, or mask that all wear and exposing, or allowing for the exposure of the true self. Essentially, it means being real and genuine.

Heidegger's concept of authenticity helps to clarify the focus of this theme. One of the crucial aspects of Vanier's concept is the need to accept oneself as he or she truly is while abandoning that which covers the true self. There is the acknowledgement that each person has weaknesses and failings but that such issues are acceptable providing that one is seeking to understand him or herself and that he or she is appropriating the possibilities that each one has been handed down by nature (Langan, 1992). This involves bearing the burden of being oneself--an unique individual with unique characteristics who

experiences the world in a unique manner--rather than escaping to the safety of the so-called "they" which involves doing what everyone else is doing (Harries, 1978).

Authenticity for Vanier suggests the shedding of the protective layers that keep one from being emotionally hurt --an emptying process--so he or she can be filled up through the authentic and altruistic relationships found in community. The realization that all are handicapped in some way and far from perfect is crucial. There is a strong emphasis on spirituality, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform the individual. This is where the Biblical notion of "in weakness, strength" is evident, which aptly summarizes the focus of L'Arche.

Finally, the purpose of such exposure and shedding of emotionally protective coverings is that when personal agendas, goals, and plans are laid aside, one is able to respond to his or her context and address the needs of others by offering service to them.

Subtheme: Humankind Is Handicapped

Vanier writes that "we are all handicapped before God, prisoners of our egoism" (1979, p. 205). This recurring notion is found throughout his writings. In his communities, it is not only the mentally handicapped who are weak, but all humans, and community is what reveals this weakness. It is necessary to realize this in order for a community to grow and for healing to take place among its members.

In what ways, then, are human beings weak? To begin with, Vanier paints a clear picture of what he understands human nature to be. He believes that all children have been wounded by their parents due to an "unquenchable thirst" for love that can never be humanly fulfilled (1985). As a result, relational difficulties and barriers arise behind which we hide. Vanier does not fault parents, for they "love their children, but they have their own fears. They, too, have been wounded by their own parents and by life" (p. 23).

The idea of "unquenchable thirsts" is crucial to Vanier's understanding of human nature:

> Here we touch the deep mystery of the human heart, its vulnerability and its thirst for love and presence, its thirst for infinity. The human being is constantly straining towards this infinity: a thirst to be filled, to be recognized in one's uniqueness, a thirst to be free, to be loving, to be a source of life for others. But this pull towards infinity is lived by a fragile

> being, a being easily seduced by lies or caught up in fears, capable of hate, and seeking power and admiration in what is only illusion. Our thirst is infinite but it is carried in fragile vessels. (1985, p. 102)

Vanier believes this thirst is quenchable only in the after life, but that community provides the closest fulfillment of it during our present life. "There will always be discontent in the human heart" (p. 103) he concludes.

Fear plays a crucial role in keeping us from living authentically. Although all have a desire for authenticity, we lack confidence in ourselves and are afraid to expose our weaknesses (1985). We have aspirations within our hearts "toward peace, universal love and the struggle for justice" (1975, p. 23) yet we are faced "with our mediocrities, our cowardices, our fears and weaknesses" (p. 23). People know what they want to accomplish yet they are desperately afraid to expose themselves in light of the fact that they may be taken advantage of, used or simply hurt by others.

> Who can help us human beings to welcome our own fragility, which is hidden behind the barriers of our fears? Who can help us to assume the flaws of our history and our being, our agonies and weaknesses, even our mortality? We are so very poor: humanly, psychically, morally and spiritually, and we are all bound in that radical poverty: death. We all carry within us a depth of guilt. (1985, p. 173)

The answer to this rhetorical question is, as will become evident, found in community.

Community Exposes Weaknesses

Vanier's description of human nature has developed through many years of observing people coming into community and being faced with their incompetencies and inabilities to cope with the demands of community life. It is only by coming into community, becoming aware of weaknesses and accepting them that community life can be lived vulnerably, and thus authentically (1982, p. 262). From these observations, Vanier (1979) believes that each person goes through a process upon entering community, of having a time of bliss where everything and everyone is nearly perfect, to a time of great disappointment and disillusionment during which one's many weaknesses and problems begin to be exposed, to finally, a time of appreciation and realism once he or she has accepted the truth that all are weak and handicapped in some way. Without this final

realization, unity with the community and personal growth cannot be attained. Weaknesses are exposed by community. It is how they are dealt with that determines whether one will succeed in community. "So, community life brings a painful revelation of our limitations, weaknesses and darkness; the unexpected discovery of the monsters within us is hard to accept" (1979, p. 5). But acceptance is necessary if one is to move further onward into community. "People may come to our communities because they want to serve the poor" Vanier writes (1992a, p. 20). "They will only stay once they have discovered that they themselves are the poor."

The actual process of being made aware of one's weaknesses and frailness begins simply from being in close contact with other people. L'Arche communities involve living together in close quarters. Any significant community involves frequent contact with others. One's reaction to others is frequently indicative of one's own weaknesses. It is easy to live with people with whom we get along, but there will always be those in community who "drive us up the wall" (1992a, p. 34). Contact and the building of relationships with these latter people is what brings one's weaknesses into the open, but which eventually lead toward growth:

> Family or community life is the special place in which we come to know ourselves in truth. . . . In family and community life, however, we quickly discover that the enemy is within us, preventing us from being open and able to share. It is the enemy within who incites us to jealousy, infidelity, egotistical attitudes and blockages. To live in a family or in community is always humiliating for our ego which wants to excel. We quickly discover our darkness and faults and how much we need to grow and be forgiven. (1985, p. 75)

Because humans have weaknesses and fears as well as unquenchable thirsts and longings, difficulties are bound to arise when there is close contact between people.

It is amidst this revelation of weakness that the need for authenticity becomes evident. People tend to strive to "rise above the herd" (Guignon, 1993, p. 228) or as Vanier states, "to excel" and as a result, are slaves of egoism (Zimmmerman, 1986). Rather than striving to become something that one is not, or rather than competing against and comparing oneself to others, the authentic person seeks to develop and stengthen what one already is. That person seeks to live life fully

and to be involved in everyday life in a richer and fuller way. He or she resolves to being open with others and thus "allows things and other humans to manifest themselves in more complex, complete, and novel ways, rather than as mere objects or instruments for our needs" (Zimmerman, 1993, p. 245). That person realizes he or she is weak, but within the context of the community, such weakness provides the opportunity for the development of true authenticity.

When Vanier speaks of accepting one's own weaknesses, he is not advocating sloppy complacency. "It is not a fatalistic and hopeless acceptance" (1979, p. 25). What it involves is essentially a concern for the truth about oneself, "so that we do not live an illusion and can grow from where we are and not where we want to be, or where others want us to be" (p. 25). By discovering who we are in the context of our strengths and weaknesses, we are able to give of ourselves and expose ourselves vulnerably in order to serve and meet the needs of others. If we desire to enter into the interdependent relationships that Vanier's communities stress, then we must engage in the difficult and demanding process of exposing our own weaknesses (1979).

From Vanier's perspective, this process is logical and a necessary stage in one's growth. But how many of us outside such an accepting community are prepared to let down our guards, become vulnerable, and expose our weaknesses? To most people, the world is not a place of safety. We strive to succeed and to be independent in order to build our personal security. Although Vanier views this pattern as destructive, we are fearful of the cost involved in forming interdependent relationships. This leads us into the next subtheme, the need for a place of safety.

Subtheme: Community Provides a Safe Environment

While community exposes one's weaknesses and vulnerabilities and thus reveals elements of the true self, it also provides a safe and trusting environment where one can deal with these often unsettling issues. Community, as shall be seen, is a place of trust and altruistic love. It is a place of acceptance and love which Vanier believes helps people to accept and love themselves. It "is the place where we can be ourselves without fear or constraint" (1979, p. 6). An atmosphere of joy is pervasive that "comes from the fact that everyone feels free to be themselves in the deepest sense. . . . They have discovered that they are loved for themselves, not for their intellectual or manual

skills" (p. 19).

If this sounds idealistic, it is because it is somewhat ideal. As a worker at L'Arche told Vanier:

> "'I have always wanted to be transparent in community life. I have wanted more than anything to avoid being an obstacle to God's love for the others. Now I am beginning to discover that I am an obstacle and I always shall be. But isn't the recognition that I am an obstacle, sharing that with my brothers and sisters and asking their forgiveness, what community life is all about.'" (1979, p. 24)

Vanier summarizes this statement by stating that "humility and trust are more at the foundation of community life than perfection and devotion" (p. 25). Community cannot be perfect. It is made up of imperfect and weak humans who are wounded by their egoism. "It is you and me and all of us, with our faults and our qualities, learning to accept, so that none of us is crushed by an ideal to which we cannot live up" (1975, p. 83). "Community is not about perfect people" Vanier asserts. "It is about people who are bound to each other" (1979, p. 21).

Although Vanier often writes of the ideal, of what perfect community is, he acknowledges that no one will fully reach this ideal. However, he does not consider the concept of community an abstract ideal (1992a). Community "is people. It is you and I. In community we are called to love people just as they are with their wounds and their gifts, not as we would want them to be" (p. 35). Community is not something unattainable, although perfect community is. As people strive to live authentically, reveal weaknesses and love others, they become less enslaved to the egoism which greatly hinders community's existence.

Great liberty is found as a result of the loving and supporting relationships which allow people to be authentic. In such a community, people no longer need to hide their weaknesses nor make themselves out to be better than they are. Rather, there is the knowledge that they are loved and accepted in the poorest and most simple form (1975).

In Community and Growth (1979), Vanier suggests it is expected that people will be "rotters" and that they will have their own dark places. It is natural for people to have insecurities and jealousies that prevent them from drawing close to others. Human nature is wounded, imperfect, and prone to antisocial tendencies. In light of this, he stresses that community must be a place of safety where people "feel able to share even

their weaknesses without the risk of rejection" (p. 21). It is only within this safe environment, Vanier believes, that people are able to break free from their natural egoistic tendencies and move towards authenticity. The sharing of one's weaknesses is not possible unless their is an attitude of love, respect, and trust towards them. Although not all communities ever get to this point, Vanier believes the appropriate direction in which communities should be moving is towards "the place where all of us feel free to be ourselves and have the confidence to say everything we live and think" (p. 31). This is a place of safety towards which communities should strive.

For Vanier, there is also a close relationship between the community as an imperfect realization of God's love and the actual experience and knowledge of God's love as revealed through the life of Jesus. He writes "I believe that Jesus has come to lead men and women to liberty. The only condition for moving toward that liberation is to open our hearts to God, to know and accept our own poverty and fragility and to seek help" (1985, p. 66, 67). Undergirding the acceptance, love, and safety that the community provides in order for one to reveal his or her weaknesses and pain is the emphasis that one must first believe he or she is loved and accepted by God. This, in Vanier's view, is the essential realization for one to live authentically. One must experience a sense of safety not only from the people in community, but also through the love and acceptance available from God.

The Role of Authenticity

We have seen that Vanier accentuates the ideas of exposing weaknesses, faults, and inabilities, and on striving towards being authentic. He even calls people to live in personal poverty so that their own concerns do not supersede the needs and concerns of others. How, then, does this lead to a greater sense of community--what role does it play? What is the advantage of becoming weak, poor, and in need of others? Three main issues are apparent from Vanier's writings: 1. authenticity builds and strengthens community; 2. authenticity allows for personal and spiritual growth; 3. authenticity allows for altruistic love.

Subtheme: Authenticity Builds Community

Without authenticity and the realization that all are weak and poor and that all fail time and time again, personal relationships cannot develop to form the bond necessary for community. As long as one continues to

carry an appearance of being strong without needs or problems, he or she is unaccessable to those who have acknowledged their weakness. Community cannot be built between such people. Vanier writes that

> The most precious gift in community is rooted in weakness. It is when we are frail and poor that we need others, that we call them to live and use all their gifts. At the heart of community are always the people who are insignificant, weak and poor. (1979, p. 193)

A few pages later, Vanier continues:

> It is by knowing each other in this way, with our problems and weaknesses, that we become able to help each other and encourage each other to be faithful. . . . The sharing of weaknesses and difficulties and the request for help and prayer are like cement to the community; they bind people and create unity; they help us discover that we need each other if we are to remain faithful and use our gifts. . . . So we journey towards a community which is one soul, one heart, one spirit, and one body. (p. 210)

The weak and the idea of weakness are crucial to a solid community. The weak are essential to the very existence of community (1979). Vanier marvels at how nourishing it is to a community when people share their weaknesses. Seldom does sharing one's successes nourish others, but he has seen time and again how sharing weaknesses provides encouragement to others and strengthens the bond and commitment between people. By lowering the blocks around their hearts and by being willingly vulnerable and weak, people are more "open to the tenderness of relationships" (1985, p. 108). According to Vanier, all are weak and vulnerable. When one seeks to live authentically, this realization becomes clear and aids in strengthening the community.

Subtheme: Authenticity Encourages Growth

Vanier states this concept simply: "Growth begins when we start to accept our own weaknesses" (1979, p. 88). By becoming increasingly authentic through the process of dropping the barriers and fears which, although protective, prevent us from exposing our true selves, we become aware that "we are accepted with our qualities, our flaws, and as we most deeply are" (p. 19). According to Vanier, this realization forms the basis upon which personal growth can occur. Knowing that one is weak, fragile, and prone to making mistakes and hurting others, yet is loved despite all this, allows for growth to occur.

Exposing our weaknesses also helps others grow. People look to others and are influenced by what others do. When people hide their difficulties and weaknesses and promote an air of perfection and togetherness, they appear unattainable. It is important to be seen as fallible and human while at the same time attempting to grow and become whole. Vanier writes that L'Arche "wants to be a place of authentic 'rooting' where each one can find the deepest meaning of life and the flowering of his or her personality" (1985, p. 92). Without authenticity there cannot be growth.

As is his habit, Vanier again parallels the impact of community with spirituality. Not only does authenticity in community allow for personal growth, but it allows for spiritual growth. One must become aware of his or her inner poverty and weakness to allow for spiritual growth. In order to come close to God, people must, as Jesus said, become like little children, laying aside the barriers behind which they hide (1985).

> God reveals himself to the little and the wounded and to each of us to the extent that we accept that we are little and wounded. He liberates us from the prison of our egoisms and the prison of our comforts, from the prison of convention which prevents us from living as free human beings and even less as children of God. (1975, p. 40).

Similarly, he writes

> When we are conscious of our own poverty, our lack of fidelity, our fears; when we become conscious that we need our Liberator, then Jesus will reveal Himself to us as the quiet and gentle Healer, drawing us from a world of darkness to a world of light, from a world of death to a world of life. (p. 47).

Vanier sees spiritual growth as based on the need to admit weakness, a need to thoroughly examine ourselves and an awareness that we are unable to find wholeness and completeness without the help of Jesus. Authenticity is necessary to allow God to grow in an individual, while at the same time, God needs to grow within that person in order for him or her to become fully authentic.

Subtheme: Authenticity Is Necessary For Altruism

While the role of authenticity in building community and in allowing for growth is important, equally important is the role it plays in promoting altruism. Altruistic love is one of the seven major themes of community that I have identified in Vanier's

writings. It is a crucial element in community. Without it, one cannot have community. Authenticity is a necessary precursor for the development of altruistic love. If one is unable to accept his or her own limitations, weaknesses, and flaws, then the acceptance of others' limitations, weaknesses, and flaws will not be possible. Unless one is authentic, he or she will tend to view another as a means to an end rather than as he or she fully is. By accepting our weaknesses, "we can look at all men and women with realism and love. We are all mortal and fragile. But we have a hope, because it is possible to grow" (1979, p. 15). Vanier speaks from his own experience when he states that "healing cannot take place until our illusions have been exposed and we acknowledge our human reality. . . . It was only then that I was able myself to touch, with a compassionate heart, the misery of others" (1985, p. 173).

Vanier frequently alludes to the need for a rebirth in which one dies to self and is transformed in love (1975). It is a long journey, one which is never completed, but it is a necessary journey if one is to remain in community. Earlier in this section, I mentioned the process that those entering community experience as they move from a very optimistic attitude to one of anger and frustration to one of realistic acceptance. This process is essentially the rebirth process. Upon entering community, the person sees him or herself as strong and generous, able to accomplish much for others (1982). After a short time, they are faced with the realization that they are incapable and incompetent, unable to love others and to serve them as necessary. This leads to the time of disillusionment and despair, in which many people leave the community. However, if during this time of "death," the individual is able to pursue authenticity and to see and accept his or her weaknesses and pain, if they come to grips with their depression and angry feelings, and if they are able to share these with others, then they are on the road to rebirth. The result of such rebirth is love and acceptance of others. Vanier is becoming more and more convinced that the friendships of community are only possible when people accept "others as they are, without first wanting to change them" (1985, p. 174). This acceptance is only possible when one has learned to accept his or her own wounds and weaknesses, and has accepted him or herself as he or she most truly is.

To summarize then, authenticity is a core component of community. Being a part of a community tends to

expose an individual's weaknesses as they come into conflict with others in the community. The realization that all are handicapped is a result of this close contact. One of the purposes of community, however, is to be a safe place where individuals are able to come to terms with their weaknesses and to be vulnerable with others. This vulnerability (or becoming weak, poor, and helpless) builds community, allows for personal and spiritual growth, and is a necessary precursor for altruistic love.

From Vanier's writings, I get the sense that in order to become authentic, one must take steps that radically depart from mainstream society. There is a need to become immersed in such an atmosphere as Vanier's communities so that one can let down the facade that provides safety from the pains and stresses of life. He speaks of a death process that brings authenticity. Such a passage seems to necessitate the support and safety of those who are committed to staying with us until this process is completed.

Again it must be acknowledged that community is not perfect, as people are not perfect. Vanier exposes the reader to the ideal, while at the same time, stating that most communities do not reach it. Authenticity is an ideal. To the degree that it is reached, the community will be strengthened or weakened.

Theme 4: Forgiveness

"Forgiveness is at the heart of community" is a phrase found in many of Vanier's writings. Without the display of forgiveness within the community, honest and authentic relationships cannot develop. According to Vanier, forgiveness is a prerequisite to a safe environment where one can develop authentically.

Definition

Although the term forgiveness is most often associated with its theological and spiritual connotations, a number of psychotherapists are beginning to look at its role within psychology (e.g., Hope, 1987; The Human Development Study Group, 1991; Ritzman, 1987; Worthington & DiBlasio, 1991; and others). A simple definition states that to forgive is "to cease to feel resentment against, on accord of wrong committed, to give up claim to requital from or retribution upon an offender, to absolve; pardon" (Webster's Third Edition). A rather comprehensive definition of the process of forgiveness consisting of five points is provided by the Human Development Study Group (1991):

> 1) we usually have negative emotions toward another person before we forgive him or her; 2) in forgiving the other we reduce these negative emotions; 3) even though we have a moral right to the resentment, we no longer resent; 4) our new relation with the other is one of love (drawing on the Christian idea of agape); 5) we realize the other person has no moral right to that love, but we nevertheless freely offer it. (p. 493)

Ritzman (1987) writes that "genuine forgiveness is unconditional. It is immediate. It is loving. And it is joyful! It is a positive, joyous experience" (p. 6).

Vanier's use of the term is in accordance with these preceding definitions. His usage offers the following definition: Forgiveness is the acceptance of the faults, weaknesses, and problems of others which are made evident through conflict, egotistical attitudes, resentment and other interpersonal problems which create barriers between people (1982).

For Vanier, forgiveness has two aspects in the life of the community. Firstly, one must acknowledge that he or she is forgiven by God. This is the spiritual aspect of forgiveness. Secondly, individuals are to forgive others and in turn be forgiven by others. This is the practical and daily use of forgiveness. Thus, the understanding espoused by Vanier is that we can or

should forgive because God has forgiven us. I will examine these two ideas individually.

Subtheme: Spiritual Forgiveness

Vanier lays out the importance of spiritual forgiveness when he writes,

> Is it possible, though, to accept ourselves, with our darkness, weaknesses, flaws and fear, without the revelation that God loves us? It is when we discover that the Father sent his only beloved son not to judge us, not to condemn, but to heal, save and guide us on the paths of love, and to forgive us because he loves us in the depths of our being, that we can accept ourselves. There is hope. We are not imprisoned for ever by egoism and darkness. It is possible to love. (1979, p. 15).

Vanier believes that if individuals are unable to accept themselves as they truly are, they will be unable to accept the weaknesses and flaws of others. There is the need for people to view themselves authentically as God sees them. They must be healed and forgiven before they can forgive others, and it is God's forgiveness that "heals people in the depths of their being. It is this awareness of forgiveness that progressively transforms the wounded image of self into the positive image of a child of God" (1985, p. 127). Once individuals have experienced God's forgiveness and realized that they are accepted by him, they are able in turn to forgive others. Vanier calls this the heart of the message of Christ, that he gives people an inner strength in order to forgive others (1992a). All are wounded and as a result hurt others. Therefore, "at the heart of a caring community is forgiveness, one to another" (1992a, p. 40). God has offered his forgiveness to all people. They in turn need to forgive others.

In a society where pain and hurt appear to be commonplace, where many children are sexually abused and in many ways robbed of their innocence, where divorce and the loss of a parent is normal, where random acts of violence are frequent, Vanier advocates forgiveness. Such an attitude seems dependent upon a faith that believes in a God who forgives us for our egoistic and hurtful behaviour. We have all been hurt by someone. Vanier advocates on the basis of his relationship with God that we need to consider forgiving those who have hurt us.

Subtheme: Practical Forgiveness

No matter how far one has grown in community, there

are always words, actions, and attitudes that hurt others. That is why community implies "a constant effort, an acceptance which is daily, and mutual forgiveness" (1979, p. 16). The centrality of forgiveness is apparent from Vanier's suggestion that the reason people come into community is to discover the "mystery of forgiveness" (p. 16). Relationships are only authentic when they are based on forgiveness because forgiveness is needed in order to accept the weaknesses of others. There is hurt and conflict in all relationships. Only forgiveness "alone can heal the wounds inflicted on their unity. The road to unity must pass through daily forgiveness" (1985, p. 128).

Once again I return to the process whereby a person enters community (from bliss to despair to realistic acceptance) and passes from egoistic life through death to love. It is during the death stage that a person begins to learn the importance of forgiveness. Many people "bear the scars of resentment and have yet to learn to forgive, to love those who have hurt us, to attain interior freedom" (1975, p. 111). The process leading to being able to forgive is slow and involves the transformation of the individual's emotional makeup (1979). It involves the knowledge and acceptance of their own forgiveness for personal weaknesses. It means that they must accept their flaws so that they, in turn, can accept the flaws of others. The realization must be made that they are not in control of their acceptance or rejection of others, whether they are attracted to them or repulsed by them. People have little control over these inclinations. But, they need to be aware of these feelings and seek not to follow them as they will create barriers within the community. Only through this acceptance of others and forgiveness for their faults and weaknesses can individuals grow in community.

If one of the key purposes of community is to live lives that are authentic and honest, then forgiveness must have a central role in community. It is only after a person realizes that he or she is forgiven by God and by others that they are willing to allow for the removal of the mask or facade that keeps others from knowing who they really are. When a person knows that he or she is forgiven, they can begin to show weaknesses and failings, drop barriers, and move towards living authentically.

Theme 5: Celebration

The theme of celebration is tied in closely with the themes of Authenticity and Forgiveness. As Vanier writes, community

> becomes a place of reconciliation and forgiveness, where each person feels carried by the others and carries them. It is a place of friendship among those who know that they are weak but know too that they are loved and forgiven. Thus community is the place of celebration. (1979, p. 248).

Furthermore, he writes that "there is a link between forgiveness and celebration. Celebration implies forgiveness and flows from it" (1985, p. 164). It indicates that forgiveness is total and complete. Thus Vanier does not consider forgiveness alone as the heart of community, but the celebration flowing from forgiveness fills this central role as well.

Definition

Celebration at L'Arche takes on many different appearances. It involves times of singing, laughing, dancing, and praying. The Eucharist is a celebration as are the meals eaten at L'Arche. Christmas and Easter are celebrated along with other holidays and occasions such as the anniversary of the founding of the community. Residents of L'Arche go on yearly trips, or pilgrimages, to build unity as well as to simply have a joyful time together (1992b).

> Vanier describes celebration as a communal experience of joy, a song of thanksgiving. We celebrate the fact of being together; we give thanks for the gifts we have been given. Celebration nourishes us, restores hope, and brings the strength to live with the suffering and difficulties of life. (1979, p. 232).

Furthermore, "celebration expresses the true meaning of community in a concrete and tangible way" (p. 233), that is the expression of people who are together, committed to each other, and seeking to grow together in love.

A sociological perspective views celebration as "an important, often crucial, means through which people proclaim their identity and fashion their sense of purpose" (Manning, 1983a, p. x). Four features constitute celebration from this perspective (Manning 1983b p. 4): 1. It is performance oriented in that it involves a dramatic presentation. 2. It is entertainment, done for enjoyment. 3. It is public in that there is no social exclusion. 4. It is

participatory, actively involving a group's members. Although Vanier's use of celebration differs slightly from this definition as it is not always performance oriented, this definition serves to clarify the role and importance of celebration in such a group.

Subtheme: Celebration Is Purposeful

Vanier (1985, 1992b) criticizes North American culture for not knowing how to celebrate. In our culture, we know how to party and how to spend leisure time. We focus on doing what we want with our time. But we do not know about true celebration. This is something to be learned. For him, Celebration is a cry of joy and acknowledgment that our lives are woven together; it is the joyful recognition that we are bonded together with one another as part of the same body, that our differences represent a treasure and a richness, and that we can let down the barriers which keep us from one another. We rejoice at being able to share what is most profound and most vulnerable within us: we are bonded together in trust.

> Celebration is a reality of community, springing from the union and communion between its members. Its purpose is not to prove anything. It is simply the pinnacle of community life, an expression of unity which, at the same time, forges a deeper unity. (1985, p. 160).

Thus reduced to its most simple purpose, celebration is an expression of unity.

Celebration of Unity

The focal point of celebration is togetherness or unity (1992). It is the opportunity to share one's hopes and dreams and to express love for one another. It is rejoicing in being together and called to be one body. Communities are strengthened during

> the moments when together we discover that we make up a single body, that we belong to each other and that God has called us to be a source of life for each other. These times of wonder become celebration. They are like a deep, peaceful and sometimes joyful realisation of our unity and call, of the essential of our lives and of the way that God is leading us. They are a gift, a message of God in the community which awakens the heart, stimulates the intelligence and gives back hope. We rejoice and give thanks that we are together; we become more conscious of God's love and call for community. (1979, p. 125, 126).

Celebration not only expresses the unity of the

community, but it also strengthens this unity. The expression of unity results in strengthened unity among the group.

As previously mentioned, the L'Arche homes go on annual trips or "pilgrimages." These pilgrimages benefit the community members by exposing them to different customs, cultures, and ways of life, a purpose that Vanier believes is very important to the mentally handicapped residents of L'Arche. However, their greatest benefit is in terms of strengthened relationships (1992b). Following one of the pilgrimages, Vanier wrote that "The days [on the pilgrimage] can be difficult with fatigue, long hours in the car and special attention given to each one. But these difficulties only bring forth a deeper love and a greater unity among us" (p. 56). Following another trip, he wrote that "perhaps our greatest joy was to sense the deep love among us and to be able to share that with others" (p. 56). For Vanier, a community needs to celebrate its existence. It needs to celebrate their life together, united with each other, and committed to continued growth.

Subtheme: Celebration is Practical

Celebration in Vanier's community can take on various forms. These can range from spontaneous laughter to eating together to deeply spiritual moments. Vanier says that North Americans do not know how to celebrate. This examination will help us gain an increased understanding of the purpose of celebration.

1. Celebrating Traditions

As in all celebration, the purpose is to express the group's unity as well as to promote greater unity. Vanier (1979) believes that it is important to have traditions in the way that birthdays, marriages, the arrival of new members and so on are celebrated. The specific songs, actions and functions around these occasions are not as important as the affirmation of the "fact that we are truly members of the same family, with the same heart, soul, and spirit" (p. 108).

In addition, the annual celebration of the founding of the community is important in that it reminds the members of where they have come from and what they have gone through together. The history of the community is important in Vanier's view. "It should be told and retold, written and repeated. We are so quick to forget what God has done!" (p. 118). It is important for the community as a whole to give thanks for those who have built the community and to acknowledge those now living

in the community.

2. Laughter as Celebration

Although this is not a major form of celebration in Vanier's writings, it reveals the simplicity and importance of celebration. Vanier (1979) provides a revealing description of the importance of this form of celebration: "It is healing and nourishing for all the members of a community to burst out laughing until the tears run down their faces. We are not laughing at each other; we are laughing with each other" (p. 127). Laughter opens people up and provides a relaxed atmosphere in which they can grow together (1975, p. 82). This quote makes evident the simplicity of celebration in its barest form. Celebration does not have to be complex. All that it needs is a focus on being together, on unity.

3. Meal Time as Celebration

Because the members of L'Arche communities live together, much emphasis is placed on meal time and especially on the evening meal. As Vanier (1975) states,

> Food is important, and it should be good. Meals shouldn't be just something slopped onto the table; they should be times of communion. This is hard to convey in North America, where meals are often just something you throw into your stomach and have to get through. . . . The meal is a whole ritual which begins with the soup and goes right through to the washing up. (p. 82).

Vanier (1979) spends many pages expressing the importance of meals and the value they have in shaping the identity and unity of the community. Meal time is a focal point in life at L'Arche. It is the time of the day when all members come together and have the opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns. It even extends to the cleanup time and the importance of washing the dishes together.

4. Spiritual Celebrations

Because of the emphasis on spirituality at L'Arche, spiritual celebrations are the highest form of celebration. Following the evening meals, the members of L'Arche get together for a time of sharing, singing, story telling, praying, and laughing. These times of celebrating move quickly from one element to the next--from hearty laughter to worshipful singing to heartfelt sharing and into prayer.

Vanier (1979) writes about the spiritually symbolic

purpose of celebration:

> Celebration is the sign that beyond all the sufferings, purifications and deaths, there is the eternal wedding feast, the great celebration of life with God. It is the sign that there is a personal meeting which will fulfil us, that our thirst for the infinite will be slaked and that the wound of our loneliness will be healed. (p. 248).

Spiritual celebration is a sign that individuals are not bound by the earthly, by this world, but that they are anxiously awaiting their arrival in Heaven, their eternal home. And when one is dealing with handicapped people and those who have been deeply hurt, there is little to celebrate in this life, but much to look forward to in the next.

Also apparent within spiritual celebration is that it is not always joyful and exuberant. It can be deeply reflective and silent. At L'Arche, prayer is often a central component of celebration. Vanier believes that especially the most festive celebrations should end in a quiet time of prayer, giving thanks for what they have and praying for the poor and needy who are unable to celebrate.

This is only a brief summary of some of the ways that Vanier suggests people should celebrate. Regardless of how such celebrations are carried out, the important aspect is what the focus is on. It is not what people do when they celebrate, but rather that they are celebrating their being together, united as one body. The following quote summarizes the necessity of celebration in community life:

> A community which no longer celebrates its joy at being together, united to God, and open to others is a dying community. . . . The heart of a community shows itself through the different forms of celebration and in the love, the mutual trust, the joy of being together, brothers and sisters, working towards the same goal. (1985, p. 163).

Theme 6: Altruistic Love

The sixth theme evident in Vanier's writings is altruistic love. According to Vanier, community is a place of welcome, of acceptance, and of healing based on relationships. Intrinsic within this then, is the need for love, for the expression of concern for others, and the desire for other's success and wellbeing. Throughout this discussion, the words altruism, love, and altruistic love will be used interchangeably.

Definition

I have chosen to use the term "altruistic love" to describe Vanier's community because it best captures the essence of what is experienced within these groups. Although well aware of the various nuances found attached to this term in the psychological literature, as well as being aware of the debate about the motivation of altruistic deeds and the issue of expected payoffs for performing such deeds, I feel that it is the most comprehensive term available for capturing the sense of love that Vanier describes.

Altruism is a term coined by Auguste Comte that "means selfless concern for the welfare of others" (Corsini, 1984). An act that is purely altruistic "is carried out with no concern for personal gain" (Ritzema, 1979).

This love is a selfless love, in which one puts the needs and concerns of another ahead of his or her own concerns. It involves self-sacrifice. Vanier writes that "the path of love is woven of sacrifice" (1979, p. 11). Aware of the spiritual basis for Vanier's community, this love can best be described as "doing to others as you would have them do to you" or as "loving your neighbour as yourself." It is centred in an attitude of servitude, a willingness to do the most menial tasks for the good of the community. It involves performing an act helpful to someone else without expectation of reward or repayment solely because that someone is valued on the basis of his or her being an individual who is loved by God.

Altruism means, as Rousseau has described it, seeking the fulfillment of another. It involves welcoming strangers and the undesirable. It can be seen in the notion of "agape love," meaning "a love of persons and an existential commitment to their whole being, not just a feeling or libidinal relationship. . . . Practically this may boil down to the maintenance of an attitude of forgiveness and nonretribution while doing what is necessary to protect one's self in the

future" (Brandsma, 1982, pp. 45-46). Vanier describes it as "listening to others, being concerned for them and feeling empathy with them. It means answering their call and their deepest needs. . . feeling and suffering with them. . . . [and] wanting others to fulfill themselves" (1979, p. 10-11). It involves "a desire that each of us goes further in our own gift to God and to others" (p. 11).

In Vanier's view, equally important as the action is the motivation behind it. This type of love, of giving of oneself is not done because one likes the other, nor because it advances the good of the community. Rather, the motivation is to be found spiritually, in the fact that Jesus displayed such a love, and as a follower of him, one is to seek to act as he did. There is a desire for others to grow, to succeed, and to go further in their life because that is what God desires for them. "Love is the distinctive feature of the message of the gospels" (1992b, p. 21-22) Vanier writes.

Vanier (1990) uses 1 Corinthians 13 and Galatians as an example of perfect love. He provides a paraphrased version of these verses:

> "Love is not heroic nor extraordinary acts; it is not speaking in tongues, prophesying, knowing all the mysteries and science, or even having extraordinary faith, giving all one's goods to the poor or being martyred. Love is being patient, rendering service, not being jealous or proud, not talking all the time about oneself and exaggerating one's own qualities. Love is doing nothing which bruises others; it is putting the interests of others above our own. It is not being irritable, bitter, aggressive, or searching for the ill in others; it is not rejoicing in injustice but seeking the truth in all things.
>
> . . . . growth in love is growth in joy and patience, goodness, generosity, fidelity, tenderness and self-control. It is the opposite of all our tendencies to division--hatred, quarreling, jealousy, rage, disputes, dissention, schism, desire and of all those dark tendencies which lead us to fornication, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, orgies and gluttony. (p. 90)

Subtheme: The Human Need For Love

Vanier believes that all people have an unquenchable thirst for love. We all wonder whether we are of value and whether anyone believes in us and is concerned about us (1985). We live in a world of egoism

where prime value is placed on selfish ambition and individual success. From his experience with the handicapped of L'Arche as well as from his frequent visits to prisons and institutions, Vanier is convinced that

> all of us are yearning for love. In our world, with all its false values, we can too often see only egoism, indifference and a search for material things. We all yearn for love and yet it can seem impossible to reach. This is why our world is so sad and why so many people live close to depression, frustration and aggression. (1975, p. vii).

This longing includes both a desire to be loved in a deep way and to love deeply. The yearning is for true love where one is loved and in turn is able to love freely. It is a two-way street. There is the desire to find someone "who will really understand us, who will comfort us, who will need us, who will share with us" (1975, p. 125). We desire to be loved and to love. "We are all yearning to find the perfect friend, the lover who will carry me, as I in some mysterious way will carry him" (p. 128).

Individuals are able to find fulfillment through many different venues: work, recreation, social groups and the like. But Vanier believes that all people long for more than this. They long for a friend with whom they can enter into a relationship built on trust, authenticity, affection, and tenderness (1982). Vanier's notion of community requires such love, or at least an attempt at such love. He believes the most essential need for human beings "is to have deep relationships of friendship" (1985, p. 97). It is only when this need is filled, or at least filled to a greater degree, that one is able to begin the healing process of change from a self-centred egoistic way of living to the community oriented, selfless way of living that leads to what Vanier calls inner freedom or liberty.

Many of the people with whom Vanier associates have suffered severe psychological damage. He states that they are locked in a shell, locked within themselves following years of rejection and oftentimes abuse. They are hurting and unable to relate to others. They have an intense fear of being exposed, of opening up to others, and of giving of themselves. They see themselves as useless and unlovable and are in turn incapable of love. When they come into community, they are fearful. Yet it is only when they are shown love and see that others are concerned for them regardless of

anything they have to offer or have done that they are able to begin the healing process (1985). Such effects of love on people will be examined next.

Subtheme: Altruistic Love Promotes Change

If as Vanier states, we all have a desire for love, how does being a recipient of love affect us? In what ways does it change us, motivate us, help us grow, or make us better as people? There are three main effects of love leading to change that Vanier speaks of found in community: 1. Love breaks down one's barriers; 2. Love reveals a person's value; and 3. Love is the starting point for growth.

1. Love Breaks Down Barriers

First, love breaks down people's barriers. Our society encourages individuals to set up barriers around themselves which protect them from getting hurt by others. Many people are afraid of getting close to others because they do not trust, believing that they will be hurt by others' selfish ambition. This selfishness and striving for personal success is what Vanier believes divides society and raises walls of fear between individuals (1985). The weak are crushed while the strong become more powerful. Love, however, begins the process of removing this fear, for "love is stronger than fear" (1979, p. 32). These communities with their focus on love bring new life and enable "people to drop their barriers of fear" (1975, p. ix).

I previously wrote that authenticity is only possible when one accepts others with their weaknesses and failures. This acceptance is based on altruistic love. By accepting others, one loves them with their egoism and aggression. "People cannot accept their own evil if they do not at the same time feel loved, respected and trusted" (1979, p. 79). A person can feel accepted and loved only when there is acceptance and love from others (1979). Without such love, people will not allow the truth about themselves to be revealed. They will continue to hide behind the walls which they have erected because it is safer that way--they cannot be hurt. This healing process takes time (1985). But within the context of a loving and supportive community, one "can break out of the vicious circle of being closed in upon oneself" (p. 87).

2. Love Reveals a Person's Value

Vanier asks, "If one has never been loved, how can one believe oneself to be lovable?" (1985, p. 15). Many have experienced very little love in their lives

and are suffering from the wounds of rejection. It is no wonder that they feel of little value and use, that they feel they have nothing to offer others.

Yet being loved, according to Vanier's writings, changes this in dramatic ways. The love that reveals a person's value is not a love of doing or giving to that person. It is deeper than that. It is a love that is committed, that is willing to stick with the person--a belief that the person is of value and therefore worth being faithful to (1985). There is an emphasis on being with the person, rather than on doing for the person. It means taking the time to listen to him or her and finding that what the person has to say is of value (1975). Vanier acknowledges this reality when he writes that for the

> person who has felt abandoned, there is only one reality that will bring him back to life: an authentic, tender and faithful relationship. He must discover that he is loved and important to someone. . . . And to love is not to do something for someone; it is to be with him. It is to rejoice in his presence; it is to give him confidence in the value of his being. It is to listen to him and to his needs and desires. It is to help him find confidence in himself and in his capacities to please, to do, to serve and to be useful. (1981, p. 260).

How many people pay a counsellor in order to have someone listen to them and reaffirm that they are indeed of value?

In our society, people buy this love because it is such a desired yet rarely attained commodity.

3. Love Is the Starting Point For Growth and Healing

Much of what was written in the two preceding effects of altruistic love apply to this third effect as well. In many ways, growth and healing can only begin once the barriers surrounding the self begin to be removed. In this section, I want to examine the issue of love's impact on growth and healing in somewhat greater detail.

Vanier (1985) states that "the starting point of human growth is in welcome and love" (p. 30). Healing takes place when one comes to realize that he or she has value through having been loved. When a person discovers that he or she is loved with such a deep love that loves regardless of what that person does, "then everything begins to change, all becomes possible, all can be accepted and loved" (p. 114). It is within this

context that healing can take place, for people are willing to take the risk of being authentic and to change and work through the pain that they have experienced.

The inverse of this is also true. When one fails to accept others, or when one's love is conditional, he or she causes greater harm to those who are already hurt. If a person seeks to change others in order to make them acceptable, he or she greatly impedes the other's healing because the other is not free to become authentic and to reveal his or her true self (1985). If one takes the time to listen to someone who is hurt, yet cuts them off and interrupts them, he or she shows them that they are unimportant and not worth listening to (1975). Thus it is necessary to be careful in the expression of attempted love, for it can bring great healing, but can also cause increased hurt if not pure.

Vanier relates a story of a person who spent a short time in the L'Arche community. When he arrived at the community, he was a hurt and despondent man. "The unconditional welcome by the people of the community so staggered him that, after a year, he returned [home] a changed man" 1985, p. 142). Love can have a powerful effect on people. It can transform people and allow them to reach their potential as human beings. As Vanier reminds us, all people long for love, yet infrequently attain it in our North American culture of egoism where the predominant ideology is to look out for number one.

Subtheme: Altruistic Love Is a Precondition for Community

I have already examined certain aspects of the role of altruism within community. I have looked at the ways that it allows for the breaking down of psychological barriers, the way it reveals the value of a person, and the way that it provides for the possibility of growth and healing. All of these could be considered as roles of altruism. However, in this section I am intending to examine how altruistic love is a necessary precondition for community, moving from looking at its impact on individuals to its impact on the very notion of community. From Vanier's perspective, without altruistic love, community cannot exist.

Vanier (1979) believes that community "begins to form when each person tries to welcome the others as they are" (p. 12). It begins to reveal itself when daily concern is shown for each other through various small gestures and sacrifices. By showing such concern and encouragement for the gifts and abilities of others,

community is strengthened. When one's own interests are laid aside and the interests of those in the community are placed at the centre, community begins to be experienced. An altruistic attitude where the concerns of others are predominant is essential.

Many people come into community in order to be happy, Vanier (1979) believes. It is only when they begin to reach out to others and to make others happy that they decide to stay in community. Being a servant is central to finding fulfillment and satisfaction in community life. Those who are willing and available to serve provide one of the greatest gifts to a community (p. 190). They build the community and provide an example as well as an encouragement to those in the community.

For a community to grow, then, there must be a heavy emphasis placed on service (1979, p. 96). This is where the role of the poor becomes apparent. Vanier states that "our first role is to love the disabled, to love them just as they are, in what is deepest in them" (1992b, p. 33). The poor and the weak are the ones who have the greatest need for love and for service (1985). They need others to help them, to show them love, to give them hope, and to give their lives purpose and meaning. Just as we saw under the theme of Poverty, the poor have a mysterious way of healing and strengthening those who serve them. When individuals reach out to the poor they are enabled to become more authentic and open with each other (1985). Thus, according to Vanier, service to the poor does not only build up our poor brothers and sisters in community, but it builds up the entire community, making it stronger, more caring, and more open to one another.

Altruistic love in community must, however, extend beyond the call of the poor. It must be practical, lived out in the daily contact of all those living together, extending from the leaders to the lowliest of members. Community can be a tiring and difficult experience. There is a need for true friendship in which people can find a refuge in one another. People need to talk and they need to be listened to (1979). There is great importance placed on those who are willing to take the time to sit down with tired and discouraged others and listen and truly hear what the person has to say. It is essential that members become increasingly open to the sufferings of others in their community. Community life, then, that is "based on listening and sharing, is a school for growth in love and communion" (1985, p. 91).

Only when the bonds of the heart are liberating and

> not possessive can the community become a place of celebration and vitality, where suffering can be shared and where each one gives life to the other, discovering their unique call and identity. (p. 100)

When one seeks the interests of others ahead of his or her own, one is giving life to another and in turn is receiving life from them.

Subtheme: The Transformation to Altruistic Love

> Sartre is wrong when he says that hell is other people. It is heaven that is other people. They only become hell when we are already locked into our own egoism and darkness. If they are to become heaven, we have to make the slow passage from egoism to love. (1979, p. 231).

The final section of the theme, Altruistic Love, deals with the previously encountered process which Vanier frequently alludes to of moving from self-centredness or egoism to altruistic love. We again return to the process that Vanier believes individuals go through when they enter community (1975). This process involves three periods: 1. a period of bliss and naive satisfaction, believing that the community has no faults; 2. a period of disillusionment where one sees only the community's and their own faults; and 3. a period of acceptance, of contentedness, and of realism, coming to understand that it is through one's weaknesses that he or she is made strong and able to live in community. It is a spiritual death and rebirth process according to Vanier: dying to oneself and one's selfish interests and so coming alive in love for others and putting their interests ahead of one's own (1975). Vanier writes that this is the moving from "the community for myself" to "myself for community" (1979, p. 6).

This transformation is a long and hard journey, filled with joys and sufferings (1975). It is a difficult process because it essentially involves a breaking away from the goals and purposes of society today with its emphasis on personal striving and success, and an accepting of an attitude of service where others' interests are seen as more important than one's own. Vanier describes our society as one,

> where people don't talk to me and don't smile with me. . . . where there is no compassion, no community, only people who run and don't stop for the sufferings of their brothers, for they are in a hurry, they have their business, their money to

> earn, and their style of life to defend. (1975, p. 11-12).

To break from this mentality into one of service and love for others is bound to be difficult as it involves adapting to a new set of values.

Yet, this transition is essential, for "a community is only a community when most of the people in it are conscientiously trying to seek the fulfillment, peace and happiness of every other member of it" (1975, p. 78). A person only becomes a true member of community when he or she consciously makes this effort towards transformation. Community demands such a change in those within it. There cannot be the unity and trust necessary for authentic relationships when people are seeking their own good because such selfishness only builds walls between one another.

The Role of Spirituality In the Transformation

In keeping with the role of spirituality in Vanier's writings, he believes that this transformation has a spiritual basis. His terminology for it is often the same as that used for a conversion process. And in effect, this transformation is a conversion to following the ways of Jesus. For these reasons, then, Vanier does not believe that this process can unfold unless its basis is in Jesus and the power of God:

> Only Jesus can heal us of our egoism and give us the strength, the love, the patience and the tenderness, the understanding and the ability to listen to wounded people. . . . Only He can transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, so that we are not afraid to say, "You are my people and I love you and I am committed to you." (1975, p. 75).

This "conversion," as it seems appropriate to refer to it, involves a rejecting of the values and goals of the world and an accepting of the values and goals taught by Jesus. It means welcoming the poor and loving them. It involves a crossing over from our world to the world of values found in the kingdom of God (p. 19).

Transformation is a conscious effort based in Jesus, that requires personal effort and work. It requires continual efforts to grow beyond the selfishness that Vanier believes is within each one. It is an everyday process in which one needs to make an effort "to remain centred on growth in love and service, on the community, and on the source of the community, God himself" (1985, p. 87). Although perfection and the reaching for the ideal continually elude each one--for no one will ever be fully transformed or converted

in their lifetime--he is able to write that for many in his community, "ambition and the desire for personal gain have truly been replaced by a deep desire to give their lives to others" (1992b, p. 52).

It is evident that Vanier believes altruistic love is a necessity for community. Everyone has a need for love and in turn to love. It is only when such love is experienced that one can begin to willingly drop protective psychological barriers without the fear of being hurt or abused. When one is loved, it is known that he or she is valued and therefore, that there must be something of value within that person. When one comes to this understanding, the process of personal growth and transformation can begin.

Community is formed only when there is a foundation of altruism so that people strive to put the interests of others ahead of their own. It requires taking on an attitude of service, where the strong serve the weak and where each one is able to find support and confirmation from the others. Those entering community do not automatically become capable of loving altruistically, but over time, through a period of transformation and growth, their values become more and more focused on others and on putting the needs of others ahead of their own.

Theme 7: Fidelity

The final theme that is essential for community as portrayed in Vanier's writings is fidelity. Fidelity is a necessary precursor for a successful and thriving community. Without a sense of fidelity, rifts may develop between those in the community and the purpose of the community may be lost. For Vanier's L'Arche,

> the focal point of fidelity. . . . is to live with handicapped people in the spirit of the Gospel of the Beatitudes. . . . Each community must recognise its own focus of fidelity, its own essential vision. If it loses sight of this focal point, it will regress, because the essential has crumbled. (1979, p. 106)

Definition

Fidelity has to do with faithful devotion and loyalty to the community as a whole and to the individual members within it. It can be broken down into four aspects intrinsic within Vanier's writings. The first of these is commitment. The American Psychological Association (1994) defines commitment as "the process or extent of devoting one's efforts or resources to an activity, task, or interpersonal relationship." For fidelity to exist within the context of community, members must be committed to the community and all that it stands for. Their dedication to the group transcends how they feel about it. They are prepared to stick with it through the good times and the bad.

A second aspect of fidelity is a sense of belonging. Belonging, Vanier suggests is a sense that "we are the group." It means that it is "my group" of which I am a part.
"To Belong," according to Kerstenberg and Kerstenberg (1988), "one has to feel a commonality and even intimacy" (p. 536). In order to be faithfully devoted and loyal to a group, there is the need for group acceptance and affiliation (Williams & Page, 1989).

A sense of unity is a third aspect of fidelity. Unity suggests that all people are working together, headed in the same direction, and focused on the same goal. It suggests that there is a bond which ties one to another. It is not every person for his or her self, but "all for one and one for all."

Finally, in order to have fidelity, trust must be evident. If there is to be faithful devotion and loyalty, there must be the belief that the others are going to be there for me, that they will do whatever

they have to in order to promote my good. This trust both suggests "the sense of confidentiality and security of the members in the group" (Roark & Sharah, 1989, p. 63) and "an expectancy. . . that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon" (Rotter, 1967, p. 651).

In order to understand the importance of fidelity in community, I will examine these four aspects within the context of Vanier's community. Within this context, it is also necessary to examine the idea of having a common goal, an idea that does not define fidelity but that, according to Vanier, is crucial to it. Without such a goal and purpose, fidelity breaks down. Vanier (1979) says that there are two essential elements within community: 1. a common goal which provides the reason for being together; and 2. a sense of belonging among the members. Without these two elements, there can be no commitment, there can be no trust, and there can be no unity. I will look at these two elements--a common goal and belonging--initially, followed by commitment, trust, and unity.

Subtheme: A Common Goal

Implicit and Explicit Goals

Intrinsic within Vanier's writings is the belief that every community has two goals, one which is more or less implicit and found in all communities, and the other which is explicit and particular to each community. Although in this section my primary focus is on the explicit goal, it is useful to delineate between the two to gain a clearer sense of the role that each plays.

The implicit goal, for Vanier, is based on the spiritual foundation of community. This goal was briefly dealt with under the theme of spirituality and has to do with the belief that a community should be a sign to the world. Based on the desire of such communities to follow Jesus and to live the Beatitudes, community should be,

> a gathering of people who want to be a sign that it is possible for men to live together, love each other, celebrate and work for a better world and a fellowship of peace. A community is a sign that love is possible in a materialistic world where people so often either ignore or fight each other. (1979, p. 228).

Central to the implicit goal is the understanding that although we have come together to do something--to fulfill the explicit goal--the implicit goal of

strengthening our love for each other and desiring to show the world that there is an alternative to egoism and selfish ambition is continually being addressed through the very fact that community involves being together. In other words, simply because members are physically together means that they are addressing the implicit goal. "In our time, when there is so much infidelity, when there are so many broken marriages. . . more and more communities need to be born as signs of fidelity" (1979, p. 53). I will return to this goal when I examine the role of commitment in community.

The Need For an Explicit Goal

If community is to succeed, it must have an aim outside itself, that is, outside of the implicit goal of successfully living together (1979). Vanier believes that all communities must have a specific project of some kind so that there is clarity on the "why" of their common life (p. 9). Without such a focus, the community will collapse. For L'Arche, "the focal point of fidelity" or the goal is to live with the handicapped in the spirit of the Beatitudes. "Each community must recognise its own focus of fidelity, its own essential vision. If it loses sight of this focal point, it will regress, because the essential has crumbled" (p. 106). Thus, Vanier urges all communities to have a charter which clearly specifies and makes explicit why they are together.

Losing Sight of the Explicit Goal

The health of a community can be measured by the ardour for and fidelity to its explicit goal. When the group is seeking to fulfill the original goal, there tends to be unity among them. However, if the group begins to lose its focus and different focal points arise for different people, then the membership is bound to crumble (1979). The

> members do not know clearly who 'their people' are; they don't know which cries they should respond to. They don't know why they should grow in light and peace and wholeness. They do not know that they are called to become a source of life for their suffering people. (1979, p. 40).

Tensions and difficulties arise until the community falls apart or refinds its calling.

Vanier believes that one of the most common problems that a community faces in remaining faithful to its goal is the influence of the outside world (1979). When the focus no longer is on serving the poor and one another, they will soon forget the meaning of the

difficulties they face and the purpose that such difficulties play in unifying the community (p. 129). It is easy for the focus of group members to shift and for them to be attracted to the wealth and prosperity found in the world and the seeming ease that this provides. But such a shift in focus, Vanier believes, results in the formation of barriers between members and the eventual death of community.

Subtheme: A Sense of Belonging

Along with having a common goal, the other essential element needed for fidelity within community is a sense of belonging. Each member needs to know that he or she is needed and that each plays an important and necessary role in the community. Vanier writes that true community is only achieved "when all its members realise how deeply they need the gift of others" and when "community is built by every one of its members, all in their own way" (1979, p. 193). This realization is in stark contrast to our production oriented society by suggesting that each person, whether weak or strong, poor or rich, is of value and has something beneficial to contribute to the community. All members need to feel that they are able to use their own gifts and abilities for the good of the group, knowing that their gifts are no more or no less important than the others' (1985). All the gifts and abilities are required.

What It Means to Belong

Vanier feels that it is obvious when members of a community have a sense of belonging. It is made evident when there is the use of terminology such as "my people" or "my group." "My people is my community, made up of those who know me and carry me" (1979, p. 8). The term "my people," according to Vanier, reveals a sense of responsibility, of ownership, and of solidarity within the group. It suggests that I am accepted as I am, for who I am and that I place value in being a part of the group. Furthermore, there is the element of commitment to the group and that I am in a covenant with the other members. Vanier believes that as a community matures as people's hearts become more open and able to love, the reality of "my people" grows stronger (1979).

Creating a Sense of Belonging

Within a community such as L'Arche and in all communities, Vanier acknowledges that it is possible to become so busy serving one another, preparing activities, working and so on that there is little time

spent talking and sharing with each other. As a result, members easily drift apart and eventually become remote to each other. Community thus begins to disintegrate as there is no longer an element of "one heart, one soul, one spirit" (1979, p. 209). Although the members may still be focused on the community's goal, there will be little knowledge among them as to how well each is doing in his or her pursuit and how each is going about fulfilling the goal. Because of this real possibility, Vanier stresses the necessity of meeting together, both for the sake of business in which the affairs of the community are assessed, and especially for the sake of celebration. He writes,

> When we celebrate we sing together, we laugh together, we pray together. This creates in the heart of each one a sense of belonging to the group, and to the community. We are made to be together, to live and work together, each one in his or her place. Among us there are bonds created by God; there is a covenant. (1985, p. 161).

In order to build a sense of belonging, there needs to be time spent with each other, to confirm one another, to build that person up, and to tell him or her that they are needed and wanted in the community. The busyness of life in community must not supersede the importance of communication and openness between group members.

Subtheme: Commitment

Two forms of commitment are necessary for the fidelity of the group: the commitment to community as a whole which emphasizes commitment to the goals and purposes of the group, and commitment to each other and the relationships within the group.

Commitment To Community

For Vanier, commitment to the community and its purposes is a spiritual event:

> Commitment in a community is not primarily something active, like joining a political party or trade union. . . . It is the recognition by its members that they have been called by God to live together, love each other, pray and work together in response to the cry of the poor. (1979, p. 37).

Vanier frequently refers to the notion of being "called by God." Community is a result of desiring to follow Jesus and necessitates being called by him in order to successfully live in this way. Anyone can enter into a community, but to make the transformation necessary to

remain in community requires what is essentially a conversion experience that is spiritual in nature.

Commitment to the idea of community means that one remains faithful to all the small tasks of servitude implicit within community. It means taking time for each other, forgiving each other, accepting a simple and unheroic life, focusing personal projects towards the good of the community and all its members, and renouncing any personal prestige (1979, p. 124). It means commitment to living the Beatitudes, allowing oneself to be touched by the poor and thus, transformed by the poor. It means that one lays aside the values of the world and adopts the values of putting others ahead of self and desiring to see their happiness and satisfaction rather than one's own.

There is also a need for obedience, without which community cannot exist (1979). This obedience involves an internalized support for the leadership of the group and for the goals that the group is striving towards. It means submitting to the group when goals or ways of reaching them differ, accepting that those who have been selected or positioned to lead the group represent the majority interest. Obedience involves "a search for communal vision; it is a belief in the principles on which the community's life and action are based" (p. 168). To remain faithful to community life, there must be the acceptance of the structures implemented within it.

Commitment To Each Other

Being committed to each other involves the element of a covenant between people involving the understanding that they will be there for each other, providing support, encouragement, and someone to talk to, regardless of mood, feeling, or whether they have time or not. This is the commitment element of love. It means "fidelity to people, with all the difficulty that this can bring when the first excitement is confronted with everyday reality" (1975, p. 125). According to Vanier, this love

> is neither sentimental nor a passing emotion. It is an attraction to others which gradually becomes commitment, the recognition of a covenant, of a mutual belonging. It is listening to others, being concerned for them and feeling empathy with them." (1979, p. 10).

Because community carries with it a certain nostalgic and idealized connotation, many enter community with fantasies and illusions of intimacy. Rather, one should be prepared to shed these and accept that the true love

found in community is "founded on a covenant of commitment" (p. 99). One comes into such a relationship with notions of bliss and anticipation, but these are quickly dashed as the reality of humanity and imperfection becomes apparent. But this dark, "winter" period is necessary to reach the height of relationship found in a covenant:

> We must learn to live through the winter, for it is a profound part of any relationship. No community of people is really born until it has worked through tension and aggression. It is when we have worked through these--whether we are a community, husband and wife, or collaborators in work--that we find each other in a new way. (1975, p. 141).

There is often a fear attached, Vanier (1979) suggests, to entering into such a covenant relationship based on commitment to each other. When one enters a covenant, there is a need to leave parts of oneself behind. The selfish desires, egoism, personal goals, and achievements need to be replaced by those of the community. One may fear that their freedom will be curtailed and that they will never be able to lay down roots elsewhere. Vanier writes that "it is true that if you marry one woman you will give up millions of others--and that's a curtailment of freedom! But freedom doesn't grow in the abstract: it grows in a particular soil with particular people" (p. 52). An individual needs to commit him or her self to others if he or she desires to experience this interior growth. They need to be involved in the lives of others if growth is desired.

Similarly, one's identity is not suppressed when he or she enters community. Rather, their deepest identity is confirmed. We are often inclined to separate ourselves from others in order to "find who we really are." Vanier advocates the opposite. We need to commit ourselves to others in order to find our true identities. Living in community "calls on the most personal gifts, the ones linked to the energy of love" (1979, p. 50). It means that identities are transformed, improved so that they are no longer representative of the world and its values, but representative of a higher level of values made evident in the Beatitudes. As has been accentuated throughout the themes, this involves a certain death to oneself in order to experience the rebirth of deeper love and commitment.

Subtheme: Trust

Trust is a necessary component of fidelity, for one

cannot be faithfully devoted and committed to something or someone if there is an element of fear, disbelief, or deception within the relationship. For Vanier, "a community is founded on the trust its members have for each other" (1979, p. 189). To enter into a covenant-type of relationship, there needs to be the belief that one will not be hurt, that one will not be abandoned, and that the others truly care for the individual. This is especially essential for those who have been hurt and abused in the past, who know what it means to be rejected and to have their trust broken. When we enter community, there is a sense of "abandoning ourselves trustingly to a new life" (1979, p. 51). It carries with it pain and despondency, even death, as the progression is made through the stages inherent in entering community. But, "it is often after suffering, after very great trials, tensions and the proof of fidelity that trust grows. A community in which there is truly mutual trust is a community which is indestructible" (p. 19). These times of pain are necessary for members of community in order for others to display their commitment to them. When one becomes despondent and strays away from the goals of the community and from the covenant amongst its members, yet is still cared for and loved in an unconditional way, trust is built. It is the realization that "you know my faults and weaknesses, but you are there for me regardless and believe in me." It is through the mutual trust among all its members that community life reaches its deepest form where relationships are lived in authenticity and servitude (1979, p. 6).

Subtheme: Unity

The final element that comprises the theme of fidelity is unity. Although unity has been implied throughout the preceding discussion, it needs to be dealt with separately in order to understand its importance in its own right. The notion of unity can easily be seen within the confines of having a common goal, belonging, and commitment. Yet I endeavor to examine it on its own in order to see its effects on the development of a sense of fidelity in community.

The Role of Unity

Unity is necessary in order to achieve the goals that the community has decided to focus upon. Vanier (1979) sees a vital link between the goal of community and the unity of its members. In many ways, they are the flip sides of a coin. Unity cannot be achieved unless there are specific goals for the community. Yet

the goals cannot be reached unless there is unity in the way they are being reached. This implies the need for acceptance among one another and freedom for members to fully exercise their gifts.

The goal of L'Arche is "to help each one to live the bonds of unity in a depth of love where all, especially the weakest ones, may find their place and carry a certain responsibility for themselves and others" (1985, p. 92). Unity suggests a depth of love that allows all to shoulder the responsibility of the community. It means that chances must at times be taken, and quality at times reduced, in order for the weakest and poorest members to have a fulfilling and rewarding role within the group. This unity implies a desire to see one another grow to become all that they can be. It also suggests the belief that all have something to offer. All members of a community have gifts and talents. Within a unified community, all gifts are seen as necessary, with no one having the better or more important gifts. All must carry the load. All must bear the burden of community. It is only when such a unity is apparent that others have the chance to grow and to heal, for many have been hurt and rejected. When they are made aware that they are needed for the good of the community, they see themselves as valued and loved. And such an awareness is necessary for growth and health.

Creating Unity

Unity is created when a community seeks authentic and meaningful goals to fulfill (1979). When the goals draw members out of their own concerns and towards a search for what is essential, the community tends to unite. Authentic and meaningful goals require the members to work together in order to succeed. When the goals are beyond any individual's ability and power, then the members must draw together and rely on one another.

When the members are not striving together, the result is often a period of tension. This tension, Vanier believes, can serve a positive function providing that the members seek to resolve it. It challenges the members, demanding them to re-evaluate, reorganize and essentially refocus their efforts, all done within the constraints of greater humility. Going through such a process in which the goals and desires of members are re-evaluated results in a greater sense of unity. As is an underlying theme in all of Vanier's writings, strength is found when we acknowledge our weakness. He

writes:

> I discover more and more that it takes months, even years to build a community. It is not done over night but takes time and suffering before we can enter into security and peace of real community, where there is deep trust and union. This suffering comes from the fact that we must learn to die to our own particular ways (formed by our individualistic style of life and education), if we are to enter into this unique community consciousness, where we are "one", thinking in the same way, desiring the same things. (1992b, p. 138).

Unity involves growth and the striving to more fully live out the example of Jesus. It involves reaching out in greater ways and capacities to the weak and the poor.

> A community cannot remain static. It is not an end in itself. . . . The more it finds unity, the more it must be prepared in some sense to lose it, through the free gift of some of its members who will create other networks of love and communities of peace. (1979, p. 108).

In concluding the theme of fidelity, I have shown the necessity of fidelity in Vanier's notion of community. Without the elements of a common goal, a sense of belonging, strong commitment to the purpose of community and to each other, trust, and strong unity among the members, community cannot exist.

A quote of Vanier's appropriately summarizes the theme of fidelity:

> L'Arche can only exist and be therapeutic if it is true community, where people are learning to accept and love each other, discovering the covenant which binds them all together, and walking towards the same goals in a spirit of cooperation and respect for each other's gifts. (1982, p. 266).

Chapter 6

Conclusions

My purpose in this chapter is to provide a summary of Vanier's seven themes as they relate specifically to healing. I have examined the themes within the context of community and here summarize their roles in making community a healing environment. In addition to this, I will examine the findings in relation to the review of the literature in order to present an understanding of Vanier's perspective in contrast to those represented in some current psychological literature.

Summary of Themes

In summarizing the seven themes, I briefly examine each as it applies to healing. My basic premise has been that community is healing and the findings revealed the healing aspects within the overall context of community. However, in the course of discovering the themes and my interpretation of them, I have looked at all aspects of community and not confined my focus solely to the healing process. Vanier's communities are communities of healing and aspects of all the themes are necessary for healing to take place. Thus, I want to highlight the ways that each theme specifically relates to healing as seen by Vanier.

Spirituality

I have emphasized that spirituality is the basis for Vanier's work. It provides the backdrop for his forage into community and the themes of community are born of his interpretation of what it means to follow Jesus. His spirituality has resulted in changed values so that he now sees greater value in the poor. As a result, Vanier's spirituality provides a healing context in that it is meant to exemplify God's love. This love is a necessary component of healing emotional wounds. It is when one realizes and accepts that he or she is loved and accepted by God that one is liberated and able to accept the healing available in community:

> Jesus has come to heal us, save us and set us free by the gift of his Spirit. That is the good news he brings to the poor: we are not alone in our sadness, darkness and loneliness, in our fears and emotional and sexual problems. He loves us and is with us: "Do not be afraid, I am with you!" (1976, p. 205).

Poverty

The theme of poverty is a component of spirituality as revealed in the Beatitudes of Jesus. The role that poverty plays in the healing process is twofold. First, reaching out to the poor affects the ones doing the reaching--it changes them and makes them more open to their interior needs and their spiritual side. Vanier (1979) writes that "the poorest people have an extraordinary power to heal the wounds in our hearts. If we welcome them, they nourish us" (p. 140). Second, it affects those being reached. Amidst the physical, spiritual and psychological poverty that so many people experience, being loved and accepted has a potentially transforming effect. These two themes, spirituality and poverty, provide the context for the healing to take place.

Authenticity

Authenticity stresses the need for people to gain an understanding of who they really are including their strengths and weaknesses. It stresses the need to shed the protective layers that keep us safe from emotional hurt. The healing evident in authenticity focuses on the fact that while we expose our true selves, we are accepted regardless of the good or bad within. Vanier believes that humans are weak and essentially handicapped. As this weakness is revealed, we are able to become honest with each other. Our relationships are no longer tempered with the fear of not being accepted. Community provides a safe environment where one can face the pain and hurt that he or she has experienced and to deal with it in a supportive environment. According to Vanier, it is only in such an environment in which people are authentic, yet supported, that people are able to heal:

> Our therapy is based on authentic relationships lived in community, which bring people hope, self-acceptance, and motivation. Through this, people discover gradually that they are part of a family and a community, and this brings them security and peace. (1979, p. 204)

In addition to this, personal growth takes place when weaknesses are accepted. A leader at the L'Arche community near Toronto said:

> The single most fundamental aspect of L'Arche which constitutes therapy is that process of accepting oneself and particularly in that process the acceptance of weakness. I think that our fundamental human struggle is to accept who we are as human beings. (Sumarah, 1983, p. 277).

Vanier's communities emphasize their role in helping people accept who they are.

Finally, the role of authenticity promotes altruism which in itself is a necessity of healing. Vanier believes that it is only when we have become aware of our own weaknesses and humanness that we are able to love others. Without becoming authentic, we have difficulty loving others and thus providing the supportive, accepting, and safe environment that is a prerequisite for healing.

Forgiveness

There are two main aspects to the role that forgiveness plays in the healing process of community. The first is that we are healed through forgiveness. Forgiveness stresses the fact that although we have faults and make many mistakes, we are still accepted. Furthermore, we are not only accepted by our companions in community, but we are accepted by God. It is this forgiveness by God that Vanier believes "heals people in the depths of their being."

The second aspect of forgiveness in healing is that once we have accepted ourselves and have been forgiven, we are able to express this forgiveness to others. In order to have authentic relationships with others, forgiveness must be at the heart of them. Without forgiveness, the rifts that inevitably develop between individuals prevent authenticity and the necessary honesty and exposure of one's true self that is crucial to healing.

Celebration

The role of Celebration in the healing process focuses on promoting the therapeutic context rather than on the therapy itself. Essentially, the act of celebration is not as important to healing as is the environment and atmosphere that it provides. Celebration sets the tone in community and emphasizes the positive aspects of being in community. It is an acknowledgment of being together and that all are committed to one another.

Vanier believes celebration is not so much an active force in the healing process as it is a sign of the healing that is taking place. It is a sign that people are living authentically and progressing towards a greater love for each other. It is a confirmation that the community is committed to working and growing together.

Altruistic Love

Altruism is a core component of the healing that occurs in Vanier's communities. He believes that all people have an unquenchable desire to love and to be loved. The most essential need for human beings in his view "is to have deep relationships of friendship." Until this need is fulfilled to some extent, the healing process cannot begin. Altruistic love provides three main effects that promote health. The first is that love breaks down the barriers that prevent people from becoming authentic. Second, love reveals a person's worth by indicating to the person that he or she is worth loving. And third, being loved provides the context in which an individual is willing to take the risk of being authentic and thus allow for healing to take place.

Vanier's definition of healing is best expressed within the context of altruistic love. It is most clearly expressed by the process whereby one moves from an egoistic way of living to the community oriented, selfless way of living. The process moves from a lifestyle whereby one is locked within a shell caused by a lack of love and trust and oftentimes abuse and moves to a place of inner freedom and liberty whereby one knows that he or she is accepted and loved regardless of faults and failings. This process can be appropriately summarized as moving from a place of being self-focused to being other-focused.

Fidelity

The primary role of fidelity is to provide a focal point for the community so it can be unified and thus accomplish the tasks that it has set as its goals. Having a common goal and a sense of direction along with a sense of commitment, trust, and unity all serve to solidify the community and its commitment to serving those who are hurting and poor. It thus provides an atmosphere for healing to occur. Vanier (1979) writes that "freedom doesn't grow in the abstract: it grows in a particular soil with particular people, Interior growth is only possible when we commit ourselves with and to others" (p. 52).

Summary of the Healing Process

Having examined the healing process in light of the themes, it is apparent that Vanier attests to the notion that community provides an appropriate environment for psychological healing to occur. As will be seen shortly when I compare Vanier's definition of health to the

definition presented in the literature review, his definition is quite esoteric, based on his belief and interpretation of Christianity. However, this belief system and worldview provides a core component to what Vanier sees as healing.

Vanier (1985) appropriately summarizes the healing process as evidenced in the L'Arche communities in his book, Man and Woman: He Made Them:

> Community is a place where people grow towards wholeness. Through authentic relationships which touch and call forth each one in their most intimate self, through a sense of belonging, through a real fruitfulness at personal and communal levels, through celebrations and, above all, through a life in communion with Jesus, each one can gradually move toward. . . integration. . . . But this community life implies that each one says, anew each day, "Yes" to one's own growth. If community is a place of beneficial relationships, it is also a place of struggle and inner pain.
>
> . . . . [T]here are certain laws which must be known and respected: we must continually bring to the consciousness of people, in a dynamic way, the goals and objectives of the community in order to stimulate the motivations and energies of each one; we must have constant recourse to prayer, putting ourselves humbly before God; we must recognize the necessity of true and simple dialogue between each other, and listen to each one, particularly to those in a minority and the most poor; we must learn to forgive and to celebrate while remaining poor, because riches, like comfort, smother energies. . . . If we are not attentive to these things, we will gradually lose the inspiration that carries us forward. And if we lose that we will begin to build barriers around ourselves; we will move towards division, separation, divorce and brokenness, towards the death of the community. (pp. 169-170)

Findings In Relation to Literature Review

It is necessary to examine the findings within the context of the review of the literature. Two key definitions within this review served as the basis for this study: 1) the definition for community; 2) and the definition for healing. I will examine these definitions in relation to Vanier's usage of the terms as revealed in the findings. Furthermore, I will examine what Vanier's response might be to our postmodern culture.

1) Community

In the review of the literature, I summarized the definition of community as: 1) involving membership; 2) a place where each person matters to each other and where others' needs are emphasized above one's own (altruistic love); 3) a place where members' needs will be met through the group; 4) and where there will be a growing sense of interpersonal openness and trust. How, then, does this definition compare with Vanier's demonstration of community? This comparison can best be made by using the above four points as a sort of template laid upon Vanier's definition as revealed in the findings.

1) Membership. Although there are no formal membership requirements within Vanier's community, there is a strong sense that those in the communities are members. This can be seen within the theme of Fidelity in the examination of Belonging. For Vanier, a sense of belonging is a necessary component for community, made evident in the speech of the members as they refer to "their" communities.

Vanier also refers to those within the communities as being "members" (e.g., 1979, p. 193). Although everyone is welcome at L'Arche, it is only those who are willing and able to live within the confines of the community's expectations who remain in the community as members.

2) A place where each person matters to each other and where others' needs are emphasized above one's own. This aspect is clearly revealed within the theme of Altruistic Love. Vanier's emphasis on unconditional love necessitates a focus on other people as opposed to an egoistical perspective.

3) A place where members' needs will be met through the group. The theme of Authenticity closely corresponds to this part of the definition. Vanier's community encourages individuals to be honest and to face their weaknesses as well as their strengths. As members become increasingly authentic, altruistic love becomes more evident, thus providing a safe environment for individuals to expose their true selves.

4) A growing sense of interpersonal openness and trust.

This is directly related to the theme of Authenticity as it is this theme that stresses the need for members to become increasingly open and trusting. The idea of trust is also evident within the theme of Fidelity, for as Vanier writes, "community is founded on the trust its members have for each other" (1979, p. 189).

Although many aspects of Vanier's community extend beyond the template provided by my working definition of community, one aspect is especially significant. The theme of Spirituality is given little regard in the literature. While in the definition provided in the literature review, Carl Rogers (1980) writes that community involves "a collective harmonious psyche, almost spiritual in nature" (p. 182), Vanier places the spiritual at the centre of his community. His spirituality is the rationale behind his notion of community and influences his worldview. As he wrote in Community and Growth, "Everything I say about life in community in these pages is inspired by my faith in Jesus" (1979, p. 3). For Vanier, his Christian beliefs are the reason for his work in community.

2) Healing

The Review of the Literature examined the notion of psychological health and found it to be a poorly defined concept. It described Jahoda's (1958) widely accepted definition including the following characteristics: a positive attitude towards self; growing or moving towards self-actualization; a sense of purpose or meaning in life; functioning independently or autonomously in the world; perceiving reality without significant distortion; and attaining mastery in the environment. The literature review also examined Frankl's and Dabrowski's theories which view suffering and distress as being essential for growth and health. With these definitions in mind, how, then, does Vanier's view of health and healing compare?

It should first be clarified that Vanier focuses on the process of healing rather than on the content. Although he states that a healthy individual has certain characteristics, he continually focuses on the growth process and on what needs to occur in order for an individual to become increasingly healthy and mature. He has an end in mind, but reaching this end is of less importance than striving towards it.

Three areas are critical to Vanier's view of health which together define what people should be striving towards.

1) Love and Wholeness. Vanier places an emphasis on growing towards a sense of universal love and wholeness, where we assume responsibility towards society, church, and the universe (1979). This involves a love for all people and a desire for their happiness. In essence, this is the replacement of our egoistic desires with altruistic love. We have moved from being

predominantly concerned with our personal needs and wants to a level of being predominantly concerned with the greater picture which focuses on others.

2) Authenticity. Vanier suggests that health involves a sense of integrity between actions and the true self similar to that proposed by Heidegger. For him, when we have accepted our wounds and weaknesses, and accepted that we are imperfect, then our actions can flow from our true selves. The barriers that we have used to protect ourselves can be discarded. This process of accepting weaknesses involves the realization that psychological peace sometimes must be given up in order to mature and become truly authentic.

3) Spirituality. The third dimension of health involves one's relationship with God. For Vanier, there is a spiritual component to human life which must be met. Although community provides the fertile environment for healing to occur, Vanier believes that a personal relationship with Jesus is necessary for healing to be complete. This relationship exposes one to a renewed sense of life whereby the perspective of the eternal overshadows the here and now. He stresses throughout his writings that we are not solely physical beings, but also spiritual beings. And for him, the spiritual supersedes the physical.

Thus for Vanier, health involves universal love and a wholeness where one considers the larger picture of life; authenticity where there is integrity between who one is and what he or she does, and where there is the acknowledgment that we are weak; and a spiritual dynamic that involves a relationship with God which gives one a renewed sense of life.

Having given this definition of psychological health, it is necessary to restate that Vanier focuses on the process of healing rather than on the content of healing. He admits that there is no perfect healing and that we all have to live with our wounds and difficulties. But by making this realization, we are enabled to live authentically as we strive to love others and to love God. And for Vanier, that is health.

Vanier's Response to Postmodern Culture

The review of the literature stated that many writers believe community is a missing ingredient in our society. In its place, individualism has flourished and the result has been a societal crisis and a thriving psychotherapy industry. Based on this study, I believe that Vanier would have some clear responses to the current issues that postmodernism is addressing.

The "Empty Self"

Cushman (1990) writes that "the self" is empty and that people focus upon consumerism and psychotherapy in order to fill it. Vanier would seem to reply to this emptiness by directing our attention to authentic relationships and humankind's need for love. Without such relationships, we cannot expect to find fullness or satisfaction in this life.

Individualism and Finding Oneself

Most critics of deconstructive postmodernism focus on individualism as a culprit in the search for finding the authentic self. Taylor (1991) writes that in this way of thinking, only the self has value and thus the concerns of others and society as a whole do not have intrinsic value. Vanier would respond that one will develop as a mature and whole individual only in the context of other people. It is only as we relate and respond to others, and as we serve each other that we can develop as individuals and begin to realize who we are in all our authenticity. Vanier's belief is clear: as we focus on others and especially upon those who are more needy than we are, we become more capable of loving others and in turn, to be loved by others.

Relativism

Donohue (1990) believes relativism is a cruel hoax that is responsible for many of our social problems. Absolute freedom is the desire of many. Vanier, while being tolerant and accepting of other people's beliefs and points of view, believes in one ultimate truth as revealed through the life of Jesus. Morality has a place in his worldview and without a common purpose and worldview, interior freedom through community cannot be attained. Without imposing his beliefs on others because of his care and respect for individuals, he quietly pursues his goal of following Jesus and in the process, shows to others the value of pursuing such a goal. It is as if he were saying, "there is only one ultimate truth and it is the foundation for healing and interior freedom, but I will respect your point of view and beliefs because I love you and care for you."

Whereas postmodern culture emphasizes individualism and relativism, Vanier focuses on altruistic love and truth as revealed through Jesus' teaching. Postmodern culture has left many people searching for meaningful relationships and a clearer understanding of who they are and of what their purpose is in life. Meanwhile,

Vanier holds out the possibility of authentic relationships within a meaningful context. The two contrast each other. One is what many consider to be their lot in life, while the other is a possibility that may seem unattainable. Yet Vanier attests to the realism of his experience. Community is not solely an unachievable desire, but something that he and thousands of others experience on a daily basis. Because of this reality, it is possible to find a meaningful life context that differs from the status quo. The final section addresses this possibility and the many concerns involved in the application of Vanier's principles.

Chapter 7

Reflections and Implications

As I reflect on the sense of community Vanier has created within L'Arche, I am impressed by the healing potential available for those residing in such an environment. The sense of acceptance and love that Vanier frequently alludes to is something that many of us desire. Our society is often experienced as cold and harsh and too often we feel that we must go it alone. Anyone who has been involved in some form of counselling or social work can attest to the widespread hurt and dismay that exists in our culture. One does not have to read the latest statistics to understand that many members within our society have experienced much pain and loneliness over the course of their lives. This seems to attest to people's sense of resigned acceptance of what life is like. We do not touch, feel, or talk, to use a phrase from the literature of the "Adult Children" movement. Rather we close in on our own situations, holding in our hurts instead of risking being rejected by others. The only exceptions to this rule are when we seek the help of a mental health professional or when we join a support group.

So it is against this grim backdrop that I hold the brightness of Vanier's communities. This sense of community provides a radical alternative to what most of us experience in our everyday life. We are socialized to be self-sufficient individuals who focus on our own needs and desires at the exclusion of the needs of others. Vanier advocates a way of life that focuses on the needs of others not only in order to help others, but so that we ourselves can grow and find greater fulfillment. It is a drastically different approach that in many ways contradicts the teachings and practices of our society.

Reflecting on Vanier's writings brings a number of issues to mind concerning his notion of community. Examining an idea as novel as this raises questions and issues that implicate a need for further research on the topic. Within this concluding chapter, I want to first examine a number of these questions and issues as well as consider the implications for further research. Secondly, I want to look at ways in which Vanier's writings can be best applied, examining their potential effects on areas including support groups and psychotherapy.

Implications for Future Research

I believe this research has provided an initial step in examining the healing role that community can play in the lives of individuals. However, a number of issues arise that suggest a need for further research.

1) The generalizability of communities such as Vanier's must be examined. For most individuals, the possibility of participating in such a community setting seems neither practical nor plausible. It is an appealing concept and appears to provide answers to many societal problems. But how can we apply it within the context of our everyday lives? Few individuals have the opportunity to live in such a community due to other responsibilities and priorities. How then, can the principles found within Vanier's writings be applied to mainstream society? Are these principles generalizable from one context to another? Vanier's context may be the ideal for providing the healing that he writes of, yet few of us are ever going to live at L'Arche. To do so, would require us to reject the values of society and focus on seeking others' interests above and beyond our own. The theory works within a live-in setting with mentally handicapped individuals and a charismatic, saintly leader. What effect will it have in my family or among my friends who will never live in such a setting?

2) A second area for further research centres on the specific ways that each theme promotes healing. I have examined the community themes that provide for the healing context, yet have not specifically looked at how each of these elements provides healing. There is a vast literature within psychology that deals with issues such as spirituality, forgiveness, authenticity, altruistic love, commitment, belonging and so on that this research has only begun to tap into. What role do each of these elements specifically play in providing psychological health? I have identified the necessary elements and examined how Vanier believes they work. The next step is to gain a better understanding of how psychology considers each of these elements to work.

An example indicating the necessity for this research is evident when we examine the role of spirituality in Vanier's community. Vanier believes a Christian worldview is necessary because it provides the basis for a sense of valuing other members and a desire to focus on others' needs. But is such an emphasis on the spiritual required for a community to provide healing? What advantage does a Christian worldview offer over a secular or humanistic worldview or even over a worldview espoused by other religions?

Obviously, many communities have no basis in spirituality. Whether a spirituality such as Vanier's is necessary for promoting the healing context warrants further examination. Vanier's attempt to follow Jesus' teachings has led to the creation of his communities with their particular focus. Without this Christian perspective, can a community achieve the healing that Vanier sees as happening in his communities?

3) A third issue is the role of L'Arche's population. To what extent does the population of L'Arche determine its success? Without the mentally handicapped members, would L'Arche communities have the same ideology? Living with mentally handicapped individuals provides a continual reminder of the weaknesses that we all have. They provide daily examples of living authentically and honestly. Without this population, would there be the same emphasis on allowing ourselves to be authentic with each other? This again relates to the generalizability of Vanier's community.

4) The similarities between psychotherapy and community in providing psychological health is a fourth area for further research. There appear to be many similarities between some forms of psychotherapy and Vanier's community. The bases of Rogerian therapy--genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard--seem to be key components of L'Arche. Is it conceivable that counselling provides an authentic-type of relationship similar (albeit one-sided) to that of Vanier's community? Perhaps community is as effective in moving one towards psychological health as psychotherapy. Further research is needed in order to better understand the similarities of the healing characteristics found in community and psychotherapy.

Application

Although this research has raised numerous issues that are worthy of further examination, it has also provided clarity to a number of areas within the wide sphere of psychotherapy's influence. The first of these areas focuses on the strength of the support/self-help group movement, while the second concerns itself with the counselling process.

The Role of Community in Support and Self-Help Groups

To a certain extent, this research has explained the popularity and success of the self-help/support group movement. With such large numbers of people taking part in these groups (fifteen million people in

the United States alone is one estimate [Kaminer, 1993]), the question often asked is "Why?" Based on this research, a logical interpretation would suggest that the popularity of these groups is related to the sense of community experienced within them. Although I have considered support groups as a "lesser" form of community because of their self-centred purpose, they do provide the elemental components of community: a sense of membership; influence; the integration of needs; and shared emotional connection. In addition to these basic components, there is also the potential for a greater community experience as needs are met, openness and trust developed, and even altruistic love made evident. Maybe the reason we have become a society of victims (as Kaminer [1993] states) is due to our desire for affiliation with a group of like-minded people and the community potential within such a group.

However, for the most part, the focus within support and self-help groups is on solving a specific personal problem. The emphasis is on one's own needs. Since the intent of these groups is therapeutic, Vanier's writings would suggest that if the members shifted their focus from their own needs to the needs of others, a dramatic effect on the relationships within the group and on the desired healing process would result. By refocusing the purpose of the group onto the needs of other members rather than on egoistical needs, the therapeutic element, from Vanier's perspective, would be greatly increased. As these groups currently tend to function, people participate in these groups in order to see what they can get out of them rather than in order to see what they have to offer others.

The Role of Community in the Counselling Process

As someone working within the counselling field, I have contemplated whether the change I observe in my clients is a result of specific psychotherapy techniques or whether my main mode of influence is the sense of "community" I provide. Although the relationship is one-sided (and therefore could be considered a sort of pseudo-community), am I as a counsellor providing a healing context for my client because I am displaying altruistic love and authentic concern for the individual while expecting the client's authenticity in return? It would appear, based on this research, that much of the value I as a counsellor have is in being able to display this sense of community. Much of Rogerian counselling would seem to suggest this. Clearly, there are specific therapeutic tools and techniques that I use that fall outside of a community-type of relationship, but the

influence of the relationship developed between client and counsellor may be of greater therapeutic value.

Cushman (1990) and Bellah et al (1985) suggest that one of the trends in society is to seek professional help for issues that in the past were dealt with in nonprofessional environments. It would seem that we have become so alienated and individualistic that community cannot be experienced unless we pay for it. So we find ourselves paying large sums of money to maintain our anonymity and turn to professionals for relationship. Within these relationships, there is little risk of rejection and even less chance of failure. The client is right and the counsellor provides a safe environment for the dialogue to take place. But it is an artificial dialogue. The counsellor is a paid listener, hired to build up the psychological health of the client without regard to what he or she is receiving from the "relationship." Unless this barrier can be bridged, unless we begin to see our need for relationships that are not based on egoistic needs but rather seen as opportunities for mutual care, respect, and growth, and unless we begin to place value on what the other is doing, we as a society are bound to continue in the tumultuous experience of loneliness, misunderstanding, and the relentless pursuit of personal success and happiness.

Final Reflections

In conclusion, it must be said that Vanier's notion of community does not provide all the answers to the problems in society. No single solution is comprehensive enough to meet the needs of such a diverse mix of people. Our society is not healthy, and we are experiencing the repercussions of this lack of health. Vanier's writings reveal a possible solution to this malaise and the emptiness and loneliness that many of us feel. Even more so, Vanier identifies the feelings that many of us experience. He identifies the loneliness, the fear, the barriers that each of us has, and the lack of love that we have experienced, and he comprehensively furnishes us with an alternative that in its ideal, begins to resolve these issues. However, the costs of this healing are great. How much more are we in society willing to endure before we are prepared to pay these radical costs? What will it take to assume a different set of values, a revised worldview, and a renewed commitment to those who are less fortunate?

Within the smug complacency which seems to be the status quo for much of our society, many are already

beginning to taste bits and pieces of the value of the community that Vanier offers. Support groups and psychotherapy are the two most obvious examples. Many churches have entered this realm with the establishment of weekly small groups. Statistics suggest that forty percent of Americans belong to some form of small group whether it be religious in nature, an opportunity to discuss literature or politics, or sports focused (Wuthnow, 1994). We are becoming increasingly aware of this trend. Vanier provides not only an explanation for it, but also presents us with the benefits of community and offers us a detailed guideline for how this psychological healing can be attained.

Vanier's words challenge us and present us with an alternative. I have attempted to represent Vanier's ideas accurately, but it must be remembered that they are seen through my own eyes, from my perspective. Not all will wish to agree with this perspective. Our response to it must be as individual members of society. Its impact on our society is obviously related to its impact on us as individuals. Whether we fully assume Vanier's teachings or simply glean bits and pieces from them, the impact on us will be seen in a greater awareness of the needs of others, a greater desire to live authentically, and the greater possibility of psychological health.

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